

WRESTLING OBSERVER 1989 YEARBOOK

Decade In Review

\$ 12.50

Editor Dave Meltzer



FUNK
COMEBACK STORY !

- V S -



FLAIR
GREATEST EVER ?

FEUD OF THE YEAR

Best Heel
Best on Interviews
Bruiser Brody Memorial Award
Hardest Worker

Wrestler of the Year
Most Outstanding
Match of the Year VS Ricky Steamboat
Readers Favorite Wrestler



HART



WRESTLING

RIKI



WWF



UWF



CORNETTE

INTERVIEWS

FLAIR



STING

OBSERVER



1980's



RIGER

NWA

BRADY

MCMALION



TIGER

MASK

FUNK

THE WRESTLING OBSERVER'S

1989 YEARBOOK

AND DECADE REVIEW

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WRESTLING IN THE EIGHTIES

It would take an entire book by itself to do justice to the subject of pro wrestling in the eighties. In many ways, it was the most important decade in the history of the business. More money. More scrutiny. More popularity. And more changes.

The days of dozens of regional promotions running towns weekly gave way to two big promotions in the United States, running live events that drew inconsistently, and concentrating on big pay per view shows that drew millions of dollars.

When Bruno Sammartino faced Larry Zbyszko at Shea Stadium in New York on August 8, 1980, the card drew 35,771 fans and \$541,730. Those were figures unapproached in decades. The live crowd, which officially was publicized as more than 40,000 (in order to break the long-standing pro wrestling attendance mark set in 1960 for a Pat O'Connor vs. Buddy Rogers match in Chicago), was the second largest in history. But the gate itself more than doubled anything pro wrestling had produced up to that time.

That live crowd and gate mark still looks impressive today. But not nearly as much as it did more than nine years ago. Today we have hundreds of thousands of people paying millions of dollars to see the big shows, because of the advent of PPV television. The live gate record had increased five-fold, to more than \$3 million for the UWF card on November 29 at the Tokyo Dome. And who will ever forget that more than 90,000 fans paid to see Wrestlemania III live at the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan on March 29, 1987? And when all the dollars are added up, Wrestlemania V from Trump Plaza in Atlantic City on April 2, 1989 grossed approximately \$21 million and was viewed in about 650,000 paying homes and by another 220,000 live and on closed-circuit television.

But this decade was hardly all a bed of roses. In 1970, there were probably about 1,000 wrestlers who were making a living as pro wrestlers in North America. Even in 1980, that number was in excess of 500. Today, you'd be lucky to come up with 175. While the top guys are making more money than ever, the number of guys making money in this profession has badly declined. Less jobs and less places to work. Far less opportunity. And far more reliance on anabolic steroids, an illegal and potentially dangerous drug, of which dangerous dosages of became the fastest way to get a push, and not learning the intricacies of the craft.

Some day the book will be written on the decade. The decade of Vince McMahon. The decade of Hulk Hogan. The decade of Ric Flair. And the decade of Akira Maeda. The ascent of the World Wrestling Federation. The decline of regional offices. The advent of the big show. The decline in jobs. The first \$1 million per year wrestler. The first \$1 million gate. Big shows drawing crowds of a few hundred. Cable television. Network television exposure in the United States. Loss of prime time network television exposure in Japan. Toys, dolls and merchandising. Long-term contracts. Talent stagnation. Degrading gimmicks. Egomaniacal bookers. The greatest matches of all-time. The most pathetic matches of all-time. High-class production values. Drug overdoses and murder deaths of major performers. More media exposure than ever. Wrestling becoming "in," but the wrestling that was "in" really wasn't "in." Newsletters. The UWF and shooting-style. Promoters trying to lock each other out of buildings, and even attempt to monopolize cable and PPV. Big names jumping amidst massive publicity. The rise and fall of small independents and outlaw superstars.

Rather than do that book, instead let's look at the decade in two ways. First, we'll review a few dozen or so major things that occurred during the 80s that shaped pro wrestling. Then we'll list a few awards to the leading performers of the decade.

ROCK AND ROLL TAG TEAMS (entire decade): No matter what anyone says about Michael Hayes today, he is one of the great innovators in this business. His brainchild concept of the Fabulous Freebirds spawned more imitations than any other concept (a close second would be the Road Warrior concept). Today, nearly every major star enters the ring to rock music. While Hayes and the Freebirds were not the first to do this (in fact, Gorgeous George had the same entrance music as Randy Savage, but in the modern era, the first was Bad Leroy Brown in Texas in the early 70s), they got the concept over and everyone copied it. Vince McMahon should send Hayes seven figures in royalties every year just for coming up with the idea, that everyone in the business at the time thought was stupid and would never work. While the Rock & Roll tag team gimmick is pretty much dead today (the only team with the gimmick left that means anything is the Rockers), some of the greatest tag team attractions of the decade, from the Freebirds, the Fabulous Ones (Stan Lane & Steve Keirn, who had a phenomenal run in Memphis in 1983-84), the Rock & Roll Express (one of the biggest drawing cards of the decade in both the Mid-South and NWA), Midnight Rockers nee Rockers, The Foot Loose in Japan, The Fantastics to regional guys in almost every neck of the woods, used the concept until fans basically got sick of it.

RISE OF THE JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHTS (Late 1981):

In many ways, Hisashi Shinma has been the most innovative wrestling business mind of the decade. Shinma created the Japanese vs. Japanese feuding which drew tons of money, formed the original UWF and his greatest claim to fame was in creating and pushing the junior heavyweight division. Actually, the wrestler who created the popularity of the junior heavyweights was Tatsumi Fujinami, who got over originally in 1978. But the popularity went one step farther in 1981, when Satoru Sayama came in as Tiger Mask. The Tiger Mask legend is one of the great stories of the decade and his popularity created a great demand for wrestlers weighing less than 225 pounds in Japan. Tiger Mask himself achieved his greatest popularity at a weight of around 170 pounds, and during the early part of the decade, was certainly one of the two or three biggest drawing cards in the business. Sayama's popularity created the opening that allowed wrestlers like the Dynamite Kid, Owen Hart, Mark Rocco, The Cobra, Nobuhiko Takada, Keiichi Yamada, Shiro Koshinaka, Tiger Mask II (Mitsuhara Misawa), Kuniaki Kobayashi, Naoki Sano, Kazuo Yamazaki, Davey Boy Smith (before overfamiliarity with anabolics drove his weight from 210 to 265) and so many others to become huge favorites in Japan. With all the success New Japan has had with this division, which at times has become the actual trademark of the entire promotion, it's a wonder that no other promotion has ever seriously attempted to duplicate it (although All Japan did have a period in 1984-85 when Tiger Mask II had greatly hyped matches as junior heavyweight champion against Kuniaki Kobayashi).

RIKI CHOSHU TURNS (October 21, 1982): Without a doubt the face-to-heel turn that drew the most money during the decade. It started the Ishingun vs. Seikigun feud, which, with the possible exception of Freebirds vs. Von Erichs, was the feud of the decade. It also changed the face of Japanese wrestling completely. Since wrestling started in Japan in the 50s, almost all the main events were traditionally matches between Japanese and foreigners (usually Americans). While

an earlier feud with Antonio Inoki vs. Rusher Kimura was actually the one to break the tradition, Choshu's matches with the other Japanese wrestlers were the ones that made the tradition obsolete because it was the headline feud in the greatest era of Japanese wrestling popularity since the Rikidozan era.

TERRY GORDY SLAMS THE DOOR ON KERRY VON ERICH'S HEAD (December 25, 1982): The finish of the Christmas 1982 cage match between Ric Flair and Kerry Von Erich spawned the emergence of the Freebirds vs. Von Erichs feud. For a short time, it caused the emergence of Kerry Von Erich as the second most popular wrestler in the country. It was the feud of the decade, because of its length, its intensity, and the fact the promotion never even came close to the same levels after the feud ended the first time (there were second and third runs of this feud, which actually stretched into 1988, but they were like marginal sequels to excellent movies and did respectable but not outstanding box office). No single in-ring event in the United States had more impact than this.

WRESTLING OBSERVER STARTS PUBLISHING (January 1983): It's impossible for a publication to write about itself with any credibility, but this probably does belong on the list. The entire newsletter scene has become a force within the business. The Observer was far from the first newsletter, but was the first of the current style kayfabe sheets. It wasn't even the first newsletter that I wrote. The big newsletter of the 60s was called "Matmania," I believe. It was a monthly, mainly consisting of results of cards from all over the world, with a few news items and ratings. Ron Dobratz went a step farther in the early 70s with the monthly Wrestling Information Bulletin, which was filled with results of cards, and had a news section. But the news covered consisted of only what was going on in the ring, who was feuding with who, descriptions of matches and TV angles. There was almost no analysis of the news itself, nor was the business end even discussed. After Dobratz left the newsletter scene, the leading newsletter was probably a monthly published by myself, then in junior high school. It was a less professional, but every bit as thorough compilation of news and results from around the world in a similar form to what Dobratz did. Tom Burke's "Global Wrestling" was the leading publication from the mid-70s and the first to touch on business aspects, but with almost no analysis or detail. The idea of the Observer came from a few things. When I was in college, it just so happened that the sports editor of the school paper wanted me to do a feature on the local pro wrestling card in San Jose, and I did the feature on one of the main eventers, who happened to be Roddy Piper about one year before he came a big star in the Carolinas, but already a big name in Oregon. I was amazed at how many people talked to me in the days that followed about the story. It seemed like an awful lot of people I knew were closet wrestling fans, and were well aware of the weekly actions with the likes of Dusty Rhodes and Tommy Rich and Ole Anderson from Georgia. I always believed from that point on that there was a significant potential audience to this business that was untapped. An audience that was intelligent, knew full well the thing wasn't sport, but enjoyed it nonetheless. It was an audience that would enjoy talking about wrestling from a realistic viewpoint. The Observer itself started with the emergence of videotape recorders (and tape trading) and cable television. Videotapes also opened up the world of Japan, and most importantly, Tiger Mask, who revolutionized the business there and revolutionized the way many of us looked at the potential of this business over here. Cable opened up most of the United States. Suddenly it was a lot less important that Ric Flair beat Tim Woods than the kind of a worker Ric Flair and Tim Woods were. We wanted to know who was good, who wasn't so good but got a push, what angles were and weren't getting over and why. What personalities were and weren't getting over.

Many of the tape traders had already realized there was an entirely different wrestling world, with many of the best American wrestlers, in Japan, and the product was in many ways superior to what we had. We realized there were wrestlers we had barely even heard of, like Bobby Eaton, Randy Savage and the Dynamite Kid, who were a lot better than most of the legends that we read about monthly in the wrestling magazines and were on top in the big circuits. Then in 1984, when the wrestling war began, so began the era of the newsletters. The magazines were afraid to actually cover what was going on in wrestling because so much of it trod on things that would reveal wrestling wasn't pure sport. The media discovered wrestling, but the wrestling world it discovered was one manipulated and distorted to look a certain way by Titan's propagandist. Covering wrestling has been an amazing lesson in learning about the media. For example, Titan Sports actually created its own fad by getting the media to print so frequently that it was a new fad, that the public followed and began accepting wrestling as something somewhat fashionable. The original success of the Observer simply stemmed from being around in 1984 and 1985, when so many eyes were on wrestling, but nobody else was covering it in a journalistic manner. In the past few years, other newsletters have started up that cover wrestling from a similar perspective as the Observer and the entire newsletter scene has become a significant facet of the wrestling business.

THE STEROID CRAZE (June 1983): Of course, it's really ridiculous to try and pinpoint a time for this most important of trends in the industry. The increased usage of steroids to beef up and cut up physiques was every bit as inevitable in pro wrestling as it has been in football, track, power-lifting and countless other sports where muscular size is a prerequisite. When most people talk about the trend, however, the names that come to mind, not as to have started the trend, but to have changed the face of pro wrestling because of the trend, were the Road Warriors. Joe and Mark were two unknowns, a couple of massive lifters being trained by Eddie Sharkey in Minnesota with very little ring experience. Georgia Championship Wrestling was desperate for new talent at the time, especially since so many wrestlers had suddenly left the promotion. In addition its tag team that was being groomed for the title (how many of you trivia buffs remember the tag team of Matt Borne & Arn Anderson) had to be broken up because Borne had legal problems. The Road Warriors were brought in. They got over huge initially, not only in Georgia, but everywhere fans could see them on cable. For the next few years, they meant box office almost everywhere. They generated so many imitators in either face paint, leather, and especially in juiced-up physiques that it would take all day to list them. The trend increased at the speed of light with Vince McMahon Jr. in charge of the WWF. Northeastern wrestling, going back to the early 60s had always been proliferated with bigger and slower wrestlers than any other region. With steroids, bigger became more attainable and less at the will of genetics, training and overeating. While wrestlers like "Superstar" Billy Graham and Tony Atlas during the 70s became big attractions mainly due to physique, they were the exceptions, rather than today, the rule. The rule has basically destroyed careers (Greg Gagne, for example, was a top AWA star, but once the fans saw the Road Warriors, Greg's days were finished). And it's taken some people who have no right to be called wrestlers, the Anabolic Warrior of course coming immediately to mind, and made them the top stars in the business. The promoters pushed the trend, because it was a lot easier getting over muscle guys to the public than getting wrestling ability over. McMahon pushed it even harder, since he was a bodybuilder himself and was infatuated with the large-muscled wrestlers. Almost every major wrestler today has either used steroids, or uses them, and many use dangerous dosages. The sad part today is that many wrestlers don't want to use steroids, but are forced into it or else

they'll wind up with the same fate as Greg Gagne, which is to look ridiculous physically trying to compete against these monsters. It's now gotten to the point where someone with good genetics and dedication to both training and diet and no steroids looks, in the ring, like he never goes to the gym when standing side-by-side with some of his monstrous co-workers. We've had wrestlers nearly die from their usage, wrestlers have heart attacks and strokes from their usage, and yet both the wrestlers and promoters continue to play Russian Roulette by turning this profession to where it sometimes appears to be nothing but a chemical freak show.



Satoru Sayama

SATORU SAYAMA QUILTS NEW JAPAN (August 10, 1983): At the time, the New Japan wrestling promotion was far and away both the most powerful and most successful wrestling promotion on the globe. They finished a year (1982) with success beyond all belief. There were as many reasons for this as there were good wrestlers in the promotion, which was loaded from top-to-bottom. The three keys at the box office were Antonio Inoki to the adults, a veritable legend in the country for nearly 20 years, Riki Choshu to the teenagers, the rebellious hero, and Tiger Mask to the children, the fastest and highest flying wrestler ever to don the tights. The fall of New Japan started in June of 1983, when Inoki was legitimately injured during a much-publicized match with Hulk Hogan. With the fearless leader out of action, it was expected that the promotion would have a harder time packing the houses. As it turned out, they sold out nearly every show while Inoki was gone, due to the popularity mainly of Choshu, Tatsumi Fujinami and Tiger Mask. But the wrestlers weren't well paid despite the success of the promotion, and they started to look into the situation. Tiger Mask led an attempted take-over of the promotion, which ultimately failed. Rather than go back, Sayama retired from the group, and wrote a book called "Kay Fabe," which exposed the Japanese pro wrestling business. While Sayama did return to action with the original UWF, and retired again in late 1985 and never returned, this is another of those events that greatly changed the decade.

THE WAR (September 1983 through November 1987): Easily the biggest news story of the decade. The Northeast-based World Wrestling Federation decided to promote nationally. This subject itself is worth an entire book. The first shots in the war were fired silently. Vince McMahon Sr. secretly began signing up wrestlers in the summer of 1983 from the NWA's Georgia Championship Wrestling office to begin working in early 1984. The two groups were actually somewhat competing before the "big war" started. The Georgia office had expanded into promoting live shows in Ohio, Michigan and West Virginia, and ran an occasional spot in Western Pennsylvania. The WWF considered Pennsylvania as its own territory, and occasionally ran cards in Ohio, so relations between the two groups weren't on good

terms because of the overlapping areas. Ole Anderson's Georgia office, which had a degree of national exposure on the expanding WTBS out of Atlanta, then worked a deal with Joe Blanchard's Southwest Championship Wrestling, based in San Antonio, which had weekly exposure on the growing USA network. The groups, which controlled cable at that point, started making plan for national expansion together. But in September, Vince McMahon Jr. negotiated the USA spot away from Southwest Championship Wrestling. In its place, McMahon Jr. put on a show called "All American Wrestling," featuring mainly WWF matches, but also matches featuring the top attractions from around the United States (Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Ricky Steamboat, The Von Erich brothers, The Freebirds, Junkyard Dog, Roddy Piper, Greg Valentine, Butch Reed, Mike Rotundo, Jesse Ventura and Barry Windham among others). The other promotions actually sent footage to McMahon for use on his cable show, and were relieved he had gotten the spot from Southwest. Blanchard was considered an "outlaw" promoter at the time because he ran shows in the same cities as Fritz Von Erich's World Class office and Bill Watts' Mid South Sports and was threatening more expansion, and Anderson, who he was raiding, wasn't particularly popular among the other promoters because he was hooking up with Blanchard and had shown his own expansion tendencies. They didn't realize the wrestlers McMahon was featuring from other offices were the ones McMahon had targeted to raid away from those very same promotions in his bid to promote nationally.

Plans were made for the national push in early 1984. By December, McMahon had negotiated to get the NWA's time slot in St. Louis, which at the time was considered the flagship city of the organization. McMahon offered the station, KPLR-TV, \$110,000 per year plus five percent of the gate at the live shows to get the time slot that the St. Louis Wrestling Club (NWA) had going back since time began. It was the first of many such deals the younger McMahon would cut. At the same time, his father would assure promotions who were feeling threatened that no expansion plans as far as house shows were in the works, that they were simply trying to get enough syndicated outlets to make money selling ad time. Then the first big shot, the signings of Hogan, announcer Gene Okerlund and lead heel David Shults away from the AWA. At the same time McMahon Jr. signed Piper, the potential best heel in the business, away from Jim Crockett in the Mid Atlantic. Raids followed that were fast and furious. As the years went on, the WWF got more talent, more exposure and promoted in more cities. Bob Backlund was dumped as champion in favor of Hogan. After Sr. died in May of 1984, Junior signed up Cyndi Lauper, Mr. T and other celebrities to in turn make his own wrestlers, in particular Hogan and Piper, into celebrities. This set up an NBC deal, conquering PPV and by late 1987 had knocked everyone else out of contention by crippling Jim Crockett Promotions by knocking his Starrcade '87 show off PPV.

VALETS (September 1983 to present): No, valets are not new to pro wrestling. Gorgeous George had both male and female valets in the 50s. Bobby Shane had one in the 70s. And Jimmy Garvin had a girl named Sunshine in 1983. But by the fall of 1983, Garvin brought his wife Patty into the act as Precious, Sunshine was turned babyface, and Ken Mantell made his rep as a booking genius (a rep that he remained in the business long enough to totally destroy) with the valet feud. While the valet feud was not the main reason World Class was such a hot territory, nor was it the main reason the Texas Stadium show drew \$400,000—it helped. Since the unique valet angle was being done in such a hot territory, other areas tried the same valet feud, but none got anywhere near the same results. Mantell himself went valet crazy, keeping the angle going far longer than it was worth, and bringing such people like the memorable Stella Mae French (former woman wrestler Tanya West), Andrea the Lady Giant (Nickla Roberts, now Nickla Smith, who gained

more fame in the NWA as "Baby Doll") and last and certainly not least, Missy Hyatt, the walking riot. By late 1985, Vince McMahon got into the act. Ironically, he first wanted Greg Valentine to use his wife, Julie, as a valet, but Valentine declined the offer. So instead, Randy Savage brought his wife, Elizabeth, into the business. Originally Elizabeth was supposed to be a heel, her role was to play a gorgeous bitch who behind-the-scenes screwed the baby-faces in contract negotiations. But quickly McMahon saw a Beauty and the Beast angle would go farther. Elizabeth became not only a marketing commodity, but one of McMahon's biggest attractions.

THE FIRST STARRCADE (November 24, 1983): Pro wrestling entered its new era on this night. There had been closed-circuit wrestling shows in the past. Madison Square Garden had often opened up the 3,800-seat Felt Forum for closed-circuit when the live shows sold out in advance since a mid-70s feud between Bruno Sammartino and Spyros Arion. Dating back even farther, in the late 60s and early 70s, the LeBelle promotion in Los Angeles several times rented movie theaters for live broadcasts of its Olympic Auditorium house shows when the drawing power of Mil Mascaras was so great the Olympic was routinely sold out. In 1976, the Muhammad Ali vs. Antonio Inoki fiasco was closed-circuited around the United States, but it didn't start a new trend since it was a financial flop. Jim Crockett, after seeing the interest in a show he promoted in March in Greensboro, planned to closed-circuit Ric Flair's attempt to regain the NWA title from Harley Race into every major arena in the Carolinas and Virginia. The first Starrcade was also closed-circuited into Puerto Rico through the cooperation of the World Wrestling Council. The results were impressive. Greensboro easily sold out its 15,500 seats, and another 40,000 viewed the show on closed-circuit. The combined gross revenue was a then-unheard of sum of \$650,000. Flair regained the title from Race. Although he lost it a few brief times afterwards, they were all short reigns with Flair's recovery being inevitable in each case. An interesting trivia note is that Hulk Hogan was originally booked to appear on this undercard, but the deal fell through because he had a commitment to appear for New Japan's tag team tournament.

HULK HOGAN SIGNS WITH THE WWF (November 1983): While the WWF, and perhaps wrestling folklore in general, will never acknowledge this, the leading drawing card on the U.S. wrestling scene has been Hulk Hogan, dating back to 1981. Hogan's incredible popularity and drawing power burst forth in the AWA, not the WWF. By the time the WWF got Hulk Hogan he was a polished superstar attraction, complete with a large national following, a good rap and a great ability to control a crowd. Hulk-amania was born in Japan in 1980, and spread to the Midwest in 1981. Hogan was the biggest merchandise seller of all the Japanese wrestlers almost from his first tour. While on tour of Japan in November, 1983, Vince McMahon Sr. signed Hogan away from the AWA with the offer of the largest contract ever offered a pro wrestler to that point (rumored to be between \$250,000 and \$400,000 annually) and the WWF title. Hogan wanted the AWA title, but had been turned down by Verne Gagne for a number of reasons. Gagne felt, and wrongly so, that Hogan was too big to draw as champion, and also wasn't a good enough worker to be champion. Secondly, Gagne had a contract to send the AWA champion (at the time Nick Bockwinkel) on frequent Japan tours with the All Japan office, while Hogan had a long-term deal with New Japan. While it wouldn't have been impossible to make Hogan champion, politically it would have been very difficult. Hogan's signing woke the wrestling world up to the long-term plans of the World Wrestling Federation. Even though Hogan sent a telegram to the AWA from Japan informing them that he wouldn't be working future dates, the AWA continued to advertise Hogan for main events for

another six weeks. This was a huge story at the time it happened, and more than anything else, spawned the news-letter era since suddenly the hidden behind-the-scenes activity became of interest to wrestling fans with big stars jumping promotions. But in hindsight, it was even bigger.

DEATH OF THE AWA (January 1984 to present): You can't pinpoint a day, but it certainly slowly started when Hulk Hogan left. While the trend of extinction of regional offices would have hurt this group anyway, Verne Gagne was the one promoter who had a national outlet (ESPN) and still died a long, drawn out and painful brutal promotional death. While the AWA is still on television, it no longer promotes house shows and simply gets people together once a month to tape television. There are many reasons for this. Probably enough to write a book. Continual lying to the fans, a no-show rate that was laughable, continued pushing either bad or ancient performers, ancient ideas, inability to keep good performers, and so many others are factors in what was once a national power with the potential of staying one, being all but completely out of business.

DAVID VON ERICH DIES OF DRUG OVERDOSE (February 10, 1984): The Dallas-based World Class promotion, which was built around wrestlers David, Kevin and Kerry Von Erich (sons of promoter Jack Adkisson aka Fritz Von Erich) was probably the hottest office in the country at the time. Its holiday spectaculars at Reunion Arena on Thanksgiving and Christmas night of 1983 set new gate records for the state of Texas. Then, just before his first match was scheduled on a month-long tour of Japan, David, the middle brother, was found dead in his Tokyo hotel room. The death was originally attributed to enteritis, an intestinal inflammation, but it was later revealed the enteritis was a cover-up for a drug overdose. The death was the beginning of the end of the Von Erich wrestling era in Texas. While the death itself humanized the family and brought fans closer together with them, when the family continued to change its story about the death, and continued to exploit the death for promotional purposes, it left a bad taste in people's mouths. The death also led to one of the most famous matches of the decade, when Kerry, wrestling for David, three months later captured the NWA title from Ric Flair before 32,123 fans paying \$402,000 (a gate figure trailing only the Bruno-Zbyszko Shea Stadium and Starrcade gate) at Texas Stadium. David had been promised the World title in 1983 (in order to get Fritz Von Erich's vote to allow the title to go from Ric Flair to Harley Race in June, the promise was made that David would get to win the title from Race on Thanksgiving night, but instead things changed when Jim Crockett came up with the idea of Starrcade, and the title went back to Flair) and was being groomed to be Flair's replacement, at least in his father's eyes. Many believe the course of wrestling history was changed in a great way by this death.

TITAN SPORTS GET WTBS WRESTLING SLOT (June 1984): "Black Saturday" still ranks as one of the biggest stories of the past decade. As the wrestling war began, the original "fight" was between McMahon's WWF, and its cable rival, Georgia Championship Wrestling, headed up by Ole Anderson, which actually drew the largest ratings. McMahon continually raided Anderson of his talent, and Anderson himself did an incredible job of destroying his own territory with mind-boggling booking decisions. Seeing the group reeling against the ropes, McMahon tried to get in the back door and buy his leading competitor. McMahon offered Jack and Jerry Brisco, then sizable stockholders in GCW (and also the NWA's tag team champions on the Mid Atlantic circuit at the time) several hundred thousand dollars for their stock in the company, and buying a few more small stockholders, suddenly owned the majority interest. This was all unbeknownst to almost anyone in the business, and McMahon flew to Atlanta, with Gorilla Monsoon as his "bodyguard," to inform Anderson that he's history. Anderson managed to get

a restraining order to block the take-over for several weeks, but his side couldn't afford to keep paying the legal fees to keep the fight going and decided to let McMahon have the promotion. This, at a time when the media was about to start paying great attention to pro wrestling (the first MTV special was in late July and the angle to set it up, which featured rock star Cyndi Lauper appearing on several of Titan's TV shows, was in full bloom), made the WWF the only promotion with any significant national exposure. More importantly, with the inherited huge ratings the WTBS shows had on Saturday and Sunday, combined with his good ratings on USA, McMahon could brag that he was producing four of the top 10 shows on cable television, which was a fact that gave him a lot of ink as a promotional genius and his WWF credit for a resurgence of interest in pro wrestling (even though he wasn't the one who created the big audience for either network—USA's highest rated show was wrestling when Southwest had the slot). Even though a massive phone and letter writing campaign to TBS saw them give Anderson an early morning time slot and he started up a new promotion, the year McMahon had TBS allowed him to be the only promotion getting benefitted by his media blitz and claims of new popularity.

RIKI CHOSHU AND COMPANY JUMP TO ALL JAPAN (September 1984): At this point in time, Riki Choshu was the most popular and "hottest" wrestler in Japan. His popularity and the Ishingun vs. Seikigun feud were prime reasons for New Japan's incredible success (in 1982, New Japan sold out 180 of its 202 live shows and its weekly prime time network show was in the top five in the Japanese weekly Nielsen ratings). While the promotion was hurt when Satoru Sayama retired and blamed Antonio Inoki for mismanagement more than a year earlier, and again with the formation of the first UWF, these jumps were nearly a fatal blow. Not only did Choshu jump to rival All Japan, but he also influenced ten other wrestlers, including big names Animal Hamaguchi, Yoshiaki Yatsu, Killer Khan, Masa Saito, Hiro Saito and Kuniaki Kobayashi to jump with him in a seven-figure annual deal. At the time, all eyes were on Tatsumi Fujinami. TV-Asahi, which broadcasted the New Japan shows, behind-the-scenes made the statement that if Fujinami followed the group, which would raid New Japan of all its future stars, they would cancel the television show, which in a sense, would doom the promotion. But Fujinami stayed and New Japan survived. The jump led to All Japan having its best year at the gate in 1985, and greatly improved the entire work standard of the promotion. Three years later, Choshu and several of the other wrestlers jumped back to New Japan, but the first jump had far more impact.

WRESTLEMANIA I (March 31, 1985): Vince McMahon's initial crashout turned out a success, but not after a lot of scary moments. The first Wrestlemania, with Hulk Hogan teaming with television actor Mr. T against Paul Orndorff & Roddy Piper was the first attempt at a national closed-circuit pro wrestling show since the Muhammad Ali vs. Antonio Inoki flop nine years earlier. By late 1984, Titan's expansion plans were beginning to go sour. There were cash-flow problems. A few wrestlers started jumping ship. Even McMahon's most loyal front office employees began looking for new jobs. This was the ace up McMahon's sleeve. The usage of Mr. T, who had a tough guy reputation for his work as a bodyguard to famous boxers, and his TV shots on "The A-Team" (at the time one of the most popular shows on television) and from the movie Rocky III (which, coincidentally, had Hogan in a small role), who was a major celebrity at the time, along with Cyndi Lauper, was designed to get Hulk Hogan and Wendi Richter over as celebrities. It worked in one case and failed miserably in the other, but the one success meant more than 10 failures anyway. Just a week before the event, the thing had bomb written all over it. For whatever psychological reason, closed-circuit events (and PPV events as well) are a last-minute buy, but those in

the wrestling business weren't aware of that at the time. Titan's Ed Cohen was scrambling to cancel closed circuit locations in order to cut what appeared to be major losses. But a funny thing happened. Hulk Hogan choked out Richard Belzer and got publicity. Through his NBC connection with Dick Ebersol (who had planned to debut a bi-monthly late-night network special later in the year, but a lot of that was dependent upon Hogan getting over as a somewhat recognizable mainstream name) McMahon was able to get Hogan and Mr. T on Letterman and as last minute replacements on Saturday Night Live. The late hype was exceptional. The closed-circuit business was spotty, some places great, some places awful, but most places good enough. But overall, it was more than enough to be somewhat profitable, and with Titan's manipulation of the actual figures, the media treated it like it was a major success. That perception was most important, because it opened countless doors to countless things to the WWF, which was then on its way.

JIM CROCKETT GETS TBS TIME SLOT FROM MCMAHON (April 1985): The relationship between Vince McMahon and Turner Broadcasting turned sour almost from the first day. McMahon started off on bad footing because of the deluge of negative phone calls and letters to TBS when his product began appearing on TBS. McMahon's public statements to the media that the letters and phone calls were orchestrated and that the wrestling fans would soon learn the difference between major and minor league wrestling didn't sell well in the South. In addition, the contract with GCW, which McMahon immediately folded, required him to tape a show from the studio each week. What he did was send Freddy Miller to the studio to do wrap-arounds of taped matches similar to his shows on the USA network. Ratings dropped. By January of 1985, Ted Turner and Bill Watts worked out a deal where Watts would get a weekly Sunday slot on the station (which gave them three different promotions, since Ole Anderson's small-time Championship Wrestling from Georgia group was still on in an early morning slot). Watts and Turner would then have a co-venture in which they would be co-promoters for every card Watts promoted out of his traditional territory using TBS. Ironically, during the 13-week period the Watts show (Mid South Wrestling) aired on the station, it was the highest rated show on cable television. At the same time, Turner was getting ready to kick McMahon off the station. McMahon, not wanting to lose what was still his most-watched outlet before Wrestlemania, promised to do live shows and bring Mr. T to the studio, which he did, to retain the slot. McMahon also claimed that Turner wanted to buy the WWF from him, but he wouldn't sell, which he claimed, was the reason Turner turned sour on him. Turner's side claimed McMahon violated so many clauses of their contract that they couldn't begin to count them. Finally, with the slot just about ready to be lost, McMahon sold his time slot on TBS to Jim Crockett for \$1 million, and claiming his parting comments to Crockett were, "You'll choke on that million." Crockett maneuvered Watts off the Superstation, although on the final show, in a rare diplomatic move by Watts, he thanked fans for viewing and told them that a great wrestling promotion would be taking over the slot, basically endorsing the Crockett group. Watts was often critical of the WWF on his shows. This is important because if Watts, and not Crockett, had gotten complete control of the Superstation time slots in the summer of 1985, the course of wrestling history would have been different.

SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT (May 11, 1985): It was about 30 years since pro wrestling had left network television, and even a year before this, it was ridiculous to even speculate that it would ever return. But Vince McMahon and Dick Ebersol of NBC put together a concept that would make wrestling more schlockier than ever, but package it in such a way that it had never looked as good to

the less discriminating public. The first show was a test, and did a solid 8.8 rating, better than Saturday Night Live generally did in the time slot. As the years have gone by, the show has turned into almost an institution. By January of 1986, with a Hulk Hogan vs. Terry Funk match on top, the show topped a 10-rating, only the second time any show in that time slot in the history of television had reached such a large audience. The show was so successful in its late night slot that NBC gave them a prime time slot in 1988, and followed it with annual prime time slots since then. Make no mistake about it, without the network credibility, the WWF would have had a much tougher time maintaining its position in the entertainment world. A little-known fact is that what put this idea over to NBC (which was considering it before-hand, but it was not a definite go yet) was a USA-network show called TNT, and an episode with a wedding featuring prelim wrestler Paul "Butcher" Vachon. In 1989, however, there were a few uneasy moments regarding the show. Seems in the first episode after Ebersol was no longer involved, in a cage match with Hulk Hogan vs. Big Bossman, the Bossman bladed, which was a no-no in the NBC contract. There was a real stink made about it, including the threat of cancellation of the show right from the top of NBC. The department of standards was furious, and McMahon tried to explain that the cut was not from a blade, but because Bossman had been run into the cage. The only problem was, he had juiced before the first time he had been run into the cage. McMahon then claimed it was from a Hogan punch. But a few compromises were worked out, and all was safe and sound. And we won't see anymore blood on that show, either.

THE FIRST CROCKETT CUP (April 7, 1986): This doesn't make the list because it was a great success like a Wrestlemania or the first Starrcade. In reality, the show was a financial disappointment, with about 13,000 fans paying \$175,000 to the Superdome in New Orleans for the show. However, what was unique about this show was how many and how far fans would travel. This was the ultimate hardcore fan show. It was estimated that about 10,000 of the 13,000 fans were from places other than New Orleans, a percentage that probably no other wrestling card during the decade could claim. And the reason. It was the first, last and only time that wrestlers from eight different promotions worked on the same wrestling card. The Road Warriors won the 24-team tournament. With PPV enabling fans now to sit and home and see the big shows, something like this will probably never happen again.

MAGNUM T.A. CRIPPLED IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT (October 14, 1986): Another wrestler who could have been, and probably would have been a World champion, Terry Allen of Norfolk, Virginia, better known as Magnum T.A., was critically injured in an auto accident. Magnum suffered a broken neck and severe spinal damage in the accident, which at first was life-threatening. He actually made a remarkable recovery, in that he was able to walk, which originally was thought to be impossible. But his wrestling career was over. In 1988, the final year of Jim Crockett Promotions, Dusty Rhodes, who was Magnum's best friend, often used him in angles, on house shows, and as a television announcer, but with the Turner take-over, Magnum was soon out of wrestling.

WRESTLEMANIA III (March 29, 1987): This was a double success. While the 90,817 fans who paid \$1,599,000 (both more than doubling existing records) at the Pontiac Silverdome impressed the public, the real story of this show was on PPV. This was the first pro wrestling event since PPV had enough homes (about five million) to where a big event could generate incredible amounts of money. The show generated \$10.3 million in PPV and overall revenue of \$17.1 million, a record which stood until the 1989 version of Wrestlemania, when PPV had more than doubled in potential

audience. It was the success of this show that got Jim Crockett convinced the future was PPV, but his first try to breakthrough in the medium was met with disaster.

JIM CROCKETT BUYS UWF (April, 1987): The elimination of the third major promotion in the United States took place when Jim Crockett purchased Bill Watts' Universal Wrestling Federation for \$4 million (of which, Bill Watts actually received \$1.2 million). The UWF in 1986 decided to follow the WWF and NWA's lead and become a national touring outfit. The group succeeded in getting on television in more than 100 markets, and some with great time slots, but didn't have the wherewithal financially to survive being the third entry into some already over-saturated markets. As some key analyzers from Titan Sports said about the attempt, we (Titan) nearly couldn't pull it off and we were the first ones trying with a lot more exposure. Titan didn't make things easy for the UWF either, by going all-out to raid the key talent from the group, and in particular, Jim Duggan, who was the group's biggest drawing card. Duggan decided in late 1986 to join Titan, but found out his UWF contract was binding and stayed put. However, a few months later, the UWF decided that Duggan was such a pain to put up with that they let him go in order to build the promotion around Steve Williams. Faced with an impending financial crisis, Watts, through Jim Ross, opened up talks to sell to Crockett. Crockett bought the promotion not for the wrestling talent, which was some of the best in the world at the time, but for the television network, because the combination of his syndicated network and the UWF's should have meant something like \$7 million in television ad income per year (although it only materialized to closer to \$4 million). Over the next six months, Crockett and booker Dusty Rhodes did a textbook job of destroying all value of the acquisition. Since the UWF was the NWA's greatest rival to the NWA audience (since the WWF was appealing to a different crowd), Crockett and Rhodes decided that to prove the NWA was best all-along, they should "destroy" the UWF (which originally was going to be kept as a separate promotion with occasional spectaculars to be promoted using both troupes). Immediately Rhodes sent Big Bubba Rogers (now Big Bossman), who was a mid-card performer at the time in the NWA, to UWF and in his first match in, he captured the UWF's title. Two weeks later Rhodes sent Brad Armstrong & Tim Horner, two top-notch workers who were buried in NWA prelims, and in their first match, they won the UWF tag title from future superstars Rick Steiner & Sting. UWF wrestlers, even in the core UWF cities, were put low on the card while the NWA wrestlers headlined. One night in Houston, the UWF's strongest city at the time, Steve Williams, the UWF champ, defended against former champ Big Bubba Rogers, and the match was billed as sixth from the top behind all the NWA title matches. On television, Crockett, Rhodes and Magnum T.A. all tried to portray the UWF as either a heel circuit or a weak circuit in comparison with the NWA. The former UWF wrestlers were all treated as stepchildren, so to speak, and almost all either quit or were fired by the early part of 1988. With the exception of Sting (who was starting to gain a big following even though he wasn't getting any kind of a push at the time), Steiner (who was floundering around but hadn't been fired or quit yet) and Jim Ross, all the ex-UWFers had either quit or been fired. Ironically, with the talent at the top of the NWA getting stale, the addition of the UWF guys to the mix could have given the promotion at least a year of new angles and match-ups.

THE SHOOT KICK (November 19, 1987): During a six-man tag team match in Tokyo, with Riki Choshu holding a scorpion death lock on Osamu Kido, Akira Maeda came in from the blind side and threw a legitimate kick to Choshu's eye, breaking two bones underneath the eye. Since the event occurred during the annual tag team tournament, it received even more publicity than it normally would have since it

knocked the most popular wrestler (Choshu) out of the tournament, and the third most popular (Maeda) was suspended. The effect of this was incredible. Everyone in Japan, be they wrestling fans, or just the general public, knew that the kick was real. It became a hot topic of discussion. Maeda, who had always proclaimed himself to be real, became real beyond a shadow of a doubt to the public. This popularity led to the formation of the UWF and its roots in the pretense of being real led to its eventual success. But without a doubt, that kick had the most far-reaching impact of any wrestling move of the decade.

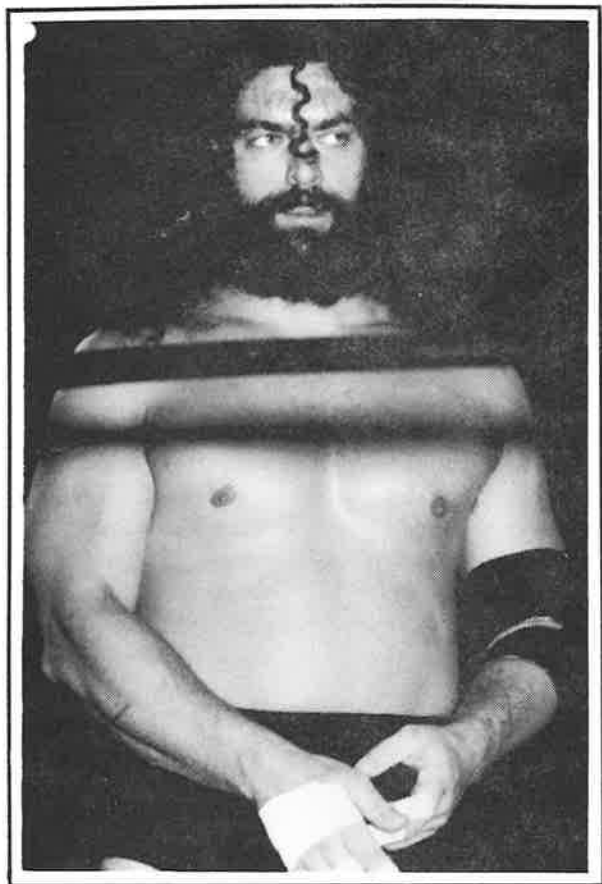
THE SABOTAGE OF STARRCADE (November 26, 1987): Since its inception in 1983, Starrcade had become a Thanksgiving day tradition for Jim Crockett Promotions. The first Starrcade, "A Flare for the Gold," sold out the Greensboro Coliseum and drew 40,000 in 17 closed-circuit locations. In 1985, Starrcade grew so big it was split into two locations, the Omni in Atlanta and Greensboro, and between live and closed-circuit, drew \$936,000. The next year, the total gross for Starrcade had increased to \$980,000. Starrcade '87 was primed to shatter those marks, because it was the first card JCP would produce for PPV. However Titan Sports, flexing its muscles from its record-shattering *Wrestlemania III*, announced its own PPV event, the first Survivor Series, the same night. Originally the NWA didn't even mind the competition. They told the cable companies that if Titan ran on Thanksgiving night, they would run in the afternoon. Many cable companies liked the idea of two wrestling PPV's on the same day, because they could group them together and sell them as a package. Most were planning on doing this when Titan flexed its muscles again. They said that any company which aired the competition show wouldn't be allowed to carry their show. In addition, Titan said that if a company carried the competition show, they wouldn't be allowed to carry *Wrestlemania IV* either. Virtually every cable company sided with Titan, because it was coming off a record-breaker. The NWA was left with only five companies and those who had satellite dishes, yet did an impressive 3.3 percent buy rate in its small universe. The move cost the Crockett company \$1 million which they banked on having. To make matters even more humiliating, Titan's *Survivors* was a first-rate exciting show. Crockett's Starrcade, a traditional winner, just didn't have either the atmosphere or action of its predecessors. One of the things the NWA was salivating about if they were tied in with the Titan package was the idea that heads-up, their superior wrestling product would win fans over. They were almost lucky they were sabotaged in that regard, as if more people had seen the show, Titan's superiority in both the technical aspect of the show and the actual wrestling aspect made the NWA look minor league. This combined with the disastrous fourth quarter television ratings brought on by the destruction of the highly-rated UWF shows, put the company well under its income projections, and eventually led to its sale.

DUMP MATSUMOTO RETIRES (February 25, 1988): While this was a big deal at the time it happened, it was more an inevitability than expected to be a something of major impact. Dump Matsumoto, one of the great heels of all-time of either sex (or specie, for that matter, because her sex in indeterminate and we've yet to figure out what actual specie she is) was going to retire because she had past the age limit. Although the tradition is for Japanese women wrestlers to retire on around their 26th birthday, Dump stayed an extra year because she wanted to, and because with offers of up to \$5,000 a week to get out of wrestling, and that was it for wrestling. Looking back, this was a lot bigger deal. TV ratings on the Fuji network for women's wrestling were hovering between a 10 and 13 in late 1987, which were absolutely phenomenal for a Saturday afternoon time slot. Dump's actual retirement drew a 14 rating, and since that time, the women's group has been hard pressed to draw sixes (before Chigusa Nagayo's retirement, and now

ratings are much lower than that). It wasn't known at the time, but Dump apparently was the attraction that drew half of the television audience (and it can be argued that Chigusa herself drew most of the other half). When Roddy Piper quit Titan, there was no effect at all on TV ratings. When Hulk Hogan left Titan for a few months, there was a very small effect on the ratings, but no more than a point. Matsumoto's general public appeal (and TV ratings measure that better than anything) was six-fold that of Hulk Hogan, although nobody knew that at the time. It seems Dump was the ultimate closet wrestling personality.

THE FIRST SUPER SUNDAY (March 27, 1988): Before Jim Crockett went out of business, he did manage to deliver a nice parting shot at Vince McMahon. After McMahon had sabotaged Starrcade, and then ran a free USA network special head-to-head with his Bunkhouse Stampede PPV in January, it was Crockett's turn for revenge. With the cooperation of TBS, which had no love for McMahon to start with stemming from his year on their station, Crockett scheduled a free Clash of the Champions from the Greensboro Coliseum head-to-head with *Wrestlemania*. This would be the first time a major NWA card would be televised live as a special event. Privately the NWA leaders before hand would have considered the show a success if it hurt *Wrestlemania's* business by five percent. They were all smiles when the dust cleared. In comparison to the previous year, *Wrestlemania's* business dropped 38 percent on PPV (in terms of the buy rate) and 50 percent in closed-circuit revenue. Cable companies were crediting the NWA without between one-quarter and one-half of the drop, and the tournament format as opposed to a single main event for the rest. To make things even brighter for the Crocketts, the show drew a 5.8 rating overall, and grew to more than a 7 rating for the Ric Flair vs. Sting main event, and the last 15 minutes of that 45 minute draw are still the most-watched quarter-hour of wrestling in the history of cable television. Crockett produced an overall show about as good as they had the potential to do at the time. And Titan's *Wrestlemania*, at Trump's Tomb in Atlantic City, was one of the biggest disasters as far as show quality since the Hindenberg. Crockett had gained revenge on his competitor and single-handedly cost them between \$2 and \$4 million. He also created a new star of his own in Sting, although his booker either recognized the fact and it threatened him, or didn't recognize it until it was too late. Crockett's revenge was short-lived, since he was still in a bad financial state. But this show was even more important then revenge. Clash was only scheduled to be a one-time event, but it did so well in the ratings that TBS wanted similar specials every quarter. And the ratings were so encouraging that when Crockett fell into his financial problems, TBS, seeing income potential in selling ads to Clashes, was willing to buy the company and keep it afloat. Looking back, McMahon's Starrcade sabotage may not have been as big a victory as it seemed. While he created a new PPV event which has done good business, he also set the stage for TBS gaining more interest in wrestling. While he knocked his leading competitor out of the game stemming from the original sabotage, the retaliation brought a larger and far more formidable competitor interested, and eventually into the wrestling business.

UWF REFORMS (May 12, 1988): The most incredible success story of the decade, with all due respect to the WWF, was this small Japanese promotion that broke record after record at the box office with no television and a tiny front office. The first card, which sold out in 15 minutes, stunned the wrestling world. Less than two years later, after a sellout in the Tokyo Dome, the success of "shooting-style" pro wrestling can no longer be called a fluke. And its top star, Akira Maeda, has turned into pro wrestling's No. 1 gate attraction.



Bruiser Brody

BRUISER BRODY'S MURDER (July 16-17, 1988): Pro wrestling's leading outlaw attraction in the United States and leading foreign attraction in both Japan and Puerto Rico was killed before a card in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. Brody set the standard for wild brawlers and for how a big-man is supposed to work to get over. As far as a single event of international significance, this was the biggest news event of the decade.

TED TURNER BUYS NWA (November, 1988): With Jim Crockett Promotions falling deeper and deeper into debt, in order to save what was left of the National Wrestling Alliance, Jim Barnett arranged a series of meetings with Turner Broadcasting, which aired the NWA telecasts. After months of on-again, off-again negotiations, rumors, denials and what have you, the deal was consummated, with the Turner group buying 65 percent of the promotion from Crockett and taking controlling interest. Without this purchase, the WWF would have been the only major league wrestling promotion left in North America. Over the long haul, because of the wealth of Turner and the expansion of PPV, unless the NWA totally collapses, it virtually insures pro wrestling as a competitive business during the 90s.

And now, a quick look at the bests of the decade. For the past several months I've been talking to several long-time students of the game about who should get decade awards. Some choices were pretty well a consensus. Others were subject of a lot more debate. But let's get on with them.

WRESTLER OF THE DECADE: Okay, it's Ric Flair. Nobody even thought twice about it. The reasons have been gone into every single year when the Wrestler of the Year ballot comes out. He's the one guy from this era who can claim to be the greatest of all-time without anyone accusing him of bragging. Equally obvious is Hulk Hogan and Akira Maeda for second and third place, respectively. Hogan was the biggest attraction in wrestling for almost the entire decade. A run of popularity like that in any entertainment industry is phenomenal. Many would argue he deserves the

top spot. But to do so would be ignoring everything that goes on between the ropes. Maeda changed the game almost single-handedly more than any wrestler since Gorgeous George.

MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER: Again, no debate necessary. Ric Flair. There are some guys with as much talent, but none who showed it to anywhere near his degree on almost every night in every year. Tatsumi Fujinami, Ted DiBiase and Ricky Steamboat seem to me to be interchangeable from second through fourth. I'd better not be accused of being a sexist, because if I ignored Jaguar Yokota and Chigusa Nagayo, the complaints would have a lot of merit. Actually one could make a good case for either of them as high as second. DiBiase and Fujinami were great in 1988 and Steamboat was incredible in 1989, and all were always at least good every year in between. Satoru Sayama, Nobuhiko Takada and Dynamite Kid were incredible, but not for as long a period of time. Bobby Eaton was great for most of the decade as well.

BEST BABYFACE: Hulk Hogan, again no arguments. Nobody is anything resembling a close second here either. Some who come to mind as candidates for the remaining spots include Chigusa Nagayo, Junkyard Dog (don't kid yourself, the guy was over like a mother in the Mid South for several years at the beginning of the decade and if he kept his head on straight, he'd be a legend today instead of a bum), Kerry Von Erich, Dusty Rhodes, Antonio Inoki and Carlitos Colon (very few men in this business drew more money over the course of the decade).

BEST HEEL: This one brought upon some debate. The consensus of those I talked with leaned toward Dump Matsumoto (my choice). Still, Roddy Piper 'Xxd Michael Hayes got a lot of consideration. The difference to me is that when Piper used to bolt the WWF every summer when he was a hot heel, the TV ratings didn't cut in half. Actually I think Hayes had more of an impact in Dallas, but still, it wasn't always hot when he was around. But Piper did it more on a national basis and became a celebrity so I'd rate him No. 2 behind the Dumpster.

FEUD OF THE DECADE: Freebirds vs. Von Erichs. It made a territory that never was the same before, or since was hot for a few years, and dragged on and on for about seven years. The rest of them were already in hot territories (Hogan vs. Orndorff, Hogan vs. Piper, Hogan vs. Savage, Ishingun vs. Seikigun) or just great matches (Midnight vs. Fantastics, Flair vs. Funk, Flair vs. Steamboat). As far as a decade long vendetta that I always enjoyed (until actually having to watch them in the ring), Dusty Rhodes vs. Ole Anderson was a lot of fun. Let's not forget Sammartino vs. Zbyszko. This set gate records everywhere it went and it was before the era of cable television.

TAG TEAM OF THE DECADE: Everyone is ready to say the Road Warriors, and they come close. Now, at no time were they the best team. Without a doubt they were the most internationally successful team and the most influential team. The Warriors are great attractions but they don't help a territory for long because the only way to keep their gimmick strong is to kill everyone else off. What has hurt them in the last few years is by not killing everyone else, they hurt their own gimmick. Good for the territory. Bad for the Road Warriors. The Crush Girls helped their promotion a whole lot more. They did tons more in the ring. And in their own way were every bit as trend-setting. The Freebirds were better for their territories, but they were never the international stars the Warriors were, plus they broke up a few times and right now don't mean a whole lot. The Midnight Express were great in the ring, but rarely worked on top. In addition, we've got two teams to pick from (Condrey & Eaton and Eaton & Lane). In 1984-85, the



Crush Girls

British Bulldogs were the best in wrestling. In 1986-87, I never saw a team as good as Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada. And there's Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood, Riki Choshu & Animal Hamaguchi, Stan Hansen & Bruiser Brody, Riki Choshu & Yoshiaki Yatsu, Jumbo Tsuruta & Genichiro Tenryu, The Funks in the early part of the decade in Japan and so many more. In all good conscience, I can't not pick the Crush Girls. They were too hot in their day, and much too good in the ring.

BEST ON INTERVIEWS: I had a few long discussions with several people about this one. When the discussions are over, and we look over all the candidates, Jerry Lawler comes out the best. He was so much more versatile than all the rest. He reacted so differently, yet always right and generally fresh (as fresh as one can be hyping a different match every week for 10 years in the same city). He was the best face interview of the decade (well, except for Ric Flair at times, but he wasn't a face a lot). And he was probably as good a heel interview as there was, just that he wasn't a heel a whole lot until the last year. A lot of people tried to copy him, every bit as many as Roddy Piper. Piper, Jim Cornette and Ric Flair are second through fourth in any interchangeable order. They were all generally outstanding and occasionally out of this world. Jimmy Hart gets honorable mention for being the best in wrestling from 1982 through 1984 and being forgettable the next six years.

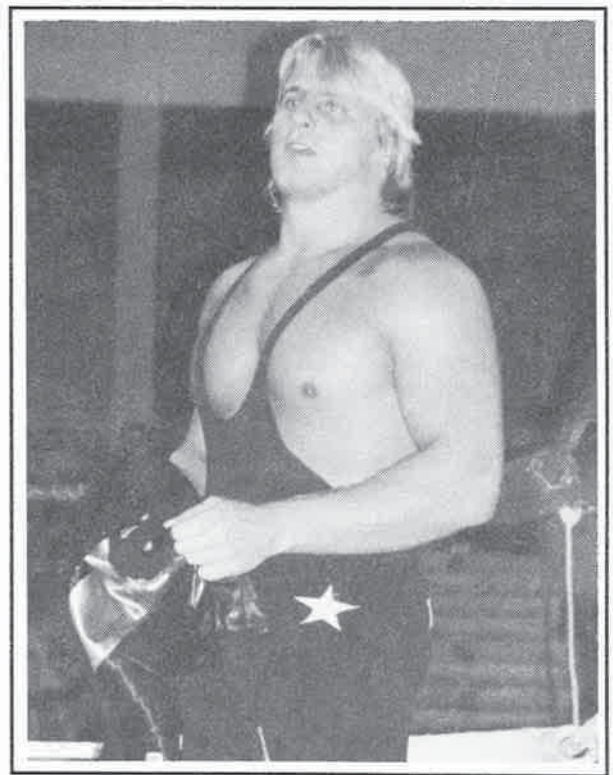
MOST CHARISMATIC: Hulk Hogan. For the decade, Ric Flair is second, but not a close second. Riki Choshu, Akira Maeda, Antonio Inoki, Roddy Piper, Satoru Sayama, Junkyard Dog (he must have had something to be so popular and it sure wasn't ability), Dusty Rhodes and maybe Kerry Von Erich should be thrown in there. Ultimate Warrior gets an asterisk. He's equal to anyone else on the list besides Hogan, but it's only in the last year or so.

BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER: Tatsumi Fujinami. For consistency and variety over a ten year period.

BEST BRAWLER: Need you ask? Bruiser Brody.

BEST FLYING WRESTLER: Actually, I believe the craziest was the young Dynamite Kid. And the best, as far as execution of moves and using the moves within a wrestling context is Jushin Riger, with Owen Hart on heels. However, Satoru Sayama so completely revolutionized what constitutes a flying wrestler that there was almost no debating giving this to him.

BEST PROMOTION: For the decade from a business standpoint, Titan Sports. For even more amazing success you can't ignore the second go-around of the UWF. Still, to pick Titan you have to ignore what the product is. If this business was called Professional stalling or Professional shortcutting or Professional posing, that's one thing. It's professional wrestling and even with its ups and downs, the best promotion for the decade has been New Japan. When it was hot in the early 80s, it was hotter than Titan ever dreamed of being. They've made a lot of bad business moves, but they're still in business and they drew some remarkable gates this year and had more classic matches in some weeks than the WWF had in the past decade. It was revolutionary and innovative in the ring, and the quality of its matches from top to bottom during most of the decade was the best around. As American promotions go, Mid South/UWF had a lot of great television and great action, but it did go out of business.



Owen Hart

BEST TELEVISION SHOW: I'm torn between three shows. New Japan when it was hot had so many great matches, back around 1982-84 at its peak. The Memphis wrestling 90 minute show, at least through 1987 or so, was the best of its kind. And Mid South is the show everyone watches back on video today and is constantly reminded of how good things used to be. I'm picking Mid South wrestling because it had great angles, great announcing, great interviews and great action. Memphis had great everything but great matches on television. New Japan only had great matches on television. The general consensus was Mid South Wrestling as well.

MATCH OF THE DECADE: Enough is written on this subject elsewhere.

BEST ROOKIE: Nobody was even close to Owen Hart in 1986. In fact, the second best rookie I saw was Bam Bam Bigelow, in 1986. And the third best was Hiroshi Hase, also in 1986.

MANAGER OF THE DECADE: Jim Cornette. The guy had five firsts, one second and one third in his first seven full years in the business. That's a hard mark to argue with. When Cornette won this award in 1986 through 1988, nobody was even close to him. Cornette also won this award as a babyface manager, which is something I can almost safely say nobody will ever do again. One can argue that Jimmy Hart was as good as Cornette, but it was only from 1982 through 1984. The only thing is, a lot of Cornette's mannerisms are taken from Hart. Bobby Heenan has been consistently good and I'd give him a clear second place, simply because Hart has just blended into the scenery for the latter half of the decade.

BEST TV ANNOUNCER: Jim Ross. Lance Russell is a clear second but I didn't even consider him for first. Ross has been among the best since 1986. But he's taken over the past two years. In fact, Ross is so much better than every



Jim Ross, Terry Funk, and Ric Flair

promotional battle-plan. Hisashi Shinma had great ideas for improving the product, but let's face it, when you've got workers like he had, maybe a lot of people with a few brain cells could look like geniuses. I mean, he was like John Wooden when Jabbar was in college. Well, I guess like Wooden, he deserves credit for being a great recruiter.

other announcer right now that if he had never been on a wrestling show prior to 1989, just for this year alone I'd still pick him first. I almost feel sorry for Ross because he is a network quality sports broadcaster and because he's in wrestling, he'll never get the opportunity. Jesse Ventura gets third for having revolutionized wrestling broadcasting. But he's never been called upon to do as wide a variety of things as Russell. When Russell left Memphis, it truly was the end of an era. When Ventura left for a summer, the TV show he was on hardly died. Others seemed to give Russell the nod, simply based on longevity.

BEST PROMOTER: Vince McMahon. Nobody else close. He was the guy who got in on the ground floor of PPV. He totally changed the business in the United States (maybe not for the best in every way, but he still changed it). Akira Maeda was great with his product, but it was a weird cult thing and not a well thought out long-term

Japanese Wrestlers' Names

Word-Search Puzzle

M R Y I K I M U R A T
T U F J Y C J A P Y I
S T F U U I H S P A G
U U A U J S N O U T E
R G Z K J I H O S S R
U I J U A I N I K U M
T A V D K D W A N I A
A Q E O A I A A M O S
U A T B V G V U R I K
M U A K A B U K I A W
M B E C T E N Y R U W

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| __ BABA | __ CHOSU | __ FUJINAMI | __ FUJIWARA |
| __ INOKI | __ JUSHIN | __ KABUKI | __ KIMURA |
| __ MAEDA | __ MUTO | __ SUZUKI | __ TAKADA |
| __ TENYRU | __ TIGERMASK | __ TSURUTA | __ YATSU |

TOP WRESTLING NEWS STORIES OF 1989

For the sport/business/entertainment form known as pro wrestling, when 1989 started, it didn't figure to be a great year.

The year 1988 was really a year of two promotions, the World Wrestling Federation in the North American and the Universal Wrestling Federation of Japan. These two groups, as completely opposite as two groups could be, dominated the wrestling business.

When 1989 began, it began with a lot of questions. This would be the first year that Turner Broadcasting Company was in control of the National Wrestling Alliance. This figured to be the only thing standing in the way of the WWF of complete and total domination of the North American scene.

The UWF in Japan, which ran its first card of the second attempt at marketing so-called "shooting style" pro wrestling in May of 1988, sold out every show that year. But there were still a lot of questions to be answered. Was the original success nothing but a flash in the pan? Would the public continue to buy the same basic match-ups over-and-over again with the same wrestlers? Would the other promotions, with more television and media exposure, eventually be able to regain the spotlight because of that?

In the United States, besides the question of how well the NWA would do under the Ted Turner leadership, the other question marks included how the small promotions would do and survive. Or more like if they could survive. The most interesting smaller promotion going into the new year appeared to be the Dallas-based World Class office, under the management of Jerry Jarrett, the long-time mogul of Tennessee and Kentucky.

As the 1988 came to a close, the first news reports came out that the New Japan promotion and the Soviet government had reached their own form of glasnost. Several Soviet amateur wrestling greats were being trained by Japanese wrestlers to turn pro in 1989. This also figured to be a major story to watch.

And the biggest story was pay-per-view television. Many cable companies by the latter stages of 1988 were worried that the constant PPV wrestling shows would over-saturate the marketplace. The buy rates were showing a steady decline in 1988 and 1989 promised more of the same--nearly a PPV show per month. How long would it take before the public started seeing these specials as something less than special?

A lot happened during the past year. But when the dust settled, from a business standpoint, the same two groups are still the dominant ones.

If anything, aside from a brief scare in February when it appeared that the lucrative Wrestlemania show would be knocked out of the box on PPV, the NWA didn't go after the WWF to any great degree. In fact, when many felt that 1989 would be the year of the first real two-sided competitive wrestling war, instead of a war that saw one side with almost all the resources dominate the smaller groups, barely a shot was fired. Sure, there were a few key changes, the WWF hired long-time NWA television announcer Tony Schiavone and manager/booker J.J. Dillon early in the year. The NWA hired away Don Glass, who was the WWF's second-in-command to Ed Cohen when it came to booking buildings. But there were few real "jumps" as far as wrestlers were concerned. Dusty Rhodes, the long-time NWA booker and top babyface (at least in his own mind and the mind of a

portion of the public as well) quit early in the year after having his power taken away from him by the new regime. Rhodes wound up in the WWF, but it was several months later, after a detour in Florida where he learned an expensive lesson about the living in the past. Barry Windham, who was being groomed by the NWA as the heir apparent to Ric Flair as World champion for the 90s, was fired after being given time off to get his hand operated, and then never had the operation. After a few months on the sidelines, he also resurfaced, as The Widowmaker, in the WWF, but by the end of the year he disappeared once again, after having surgery to remove a tumor in his chest.

What appeared to be the biggest NWA raid of the year wound up being more smoke than fire. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson, then the WWF's tag team champions, gave notice in September that they were leaving the promotion effective Thanksgiving. The two actually told the WWF office that they were leaving to work a regular schedule in Japan. Most of the wrestling world knew immediately it was to return to the NWA, where they had been top stars as part of the "Four Horseman," heel contingent. Fellow-Horseman Ric Flair has gained control of the NWA booking. Big money was promised Blanchard & Anderson--roughly double their Titan pay as tag team champions. With that story out, smoke spread through the WWF dressing rooms. Blanchard was openly talking about the money being offered, and with the paychecks down for WWF talent at the time (while some have said it was a cash-flow problem within Titan because so much was earmarked toward the movie "No Holds Barred," it was probably as much simply because Titan was running fewer shows, wrestlers were working fewer dates, and since Titan wrestlers are paid by the match and not on weekly guaranteed contracts like NWA wrestlers, the paychecks go down when fewer dates are worked). There were several interested parties, but the NWA wasn't interested in opening up the checkbook and starting a full-blown wrestling war. When the smoke all cleared, Blanchard himself never made it to the NWA either, although Anderson returned after finishing off his WWF bookings.

The NWA did gain several key talent acquisitions during the year. The two biggest were a pair of former wrestling greats who had been on the sidelines. Both ended up providing some of the classic matches of the decade. In January, Ricky Steamboat, long regarded as one of the best workers in the business, returned to the NWA after a nine month absence, after leaving the WWF after Wrestlemania IV. By the end of July, Steamboat was gone after a contract dispute. In May came Terry Funk, a pro wrestling legend who hadn't worked regularly for a major U.S. promotion since leaving the WWF after Wrestlemania II, some three years earlier. While he was out of the ring and at least temporarily retired when the year came to a close, there are many who were speculating as the year came to a close that Funk would be a key player in the wrestling game in some form or fashion in 1990.

There were bad things in 1989 for the wrestling business. The continued decline of the smaller promotions, all of which seemed at one point or another on the verge of calling it quits was alarming going in the 90s. There seems to be no indication whatsoever that this trend will change. Small promotions are valuable to the business as a whole because they provide more potential jobs for wrestlers. They also give wrestlers a place to break in and learn their craft before hitting the big-time. With no small promotions, and I don't think it'll ever get quite that extreme, but certainly there will be fewer and fewer, it's harder to bring in new stars. Even if they have the potential, they will appear green next to the established pros working the big-time circuits. House show

attendance continued to decline. This happened not only in the struggling smaller promotions, but in particular hit the NWA. The WWF felt the pinch as well, and by year's end had cut back on running shows during the middle of most weeks. Titan ran nearly 1,000 live events in 1988, but by 1990, that number will probably be closer to 600. One expects that the NWA will also cut down on the number of shows in 1990. Fewer and fewer smaller promotions will be around to run anything close to a full schedule. Really, from a business standpoint, the first year of the Turner-owned NWA could hardly be considered as positive. The house show business was awful. Internal bickering reached epic proportions. Paranoia within the group ran deep. Television ratings continued to decline and reached record lows during the first three quarters of the year.

But still, overall, one has to rank 1989 as one of the better years for the wrestling fan since the business changed in 1984.

In Japan, while the Japanese women's promotion did suffer a major business decline with the retirement of long-time superstar babyfaces The Crush Gals (Lioness Asuka & Chigusa Nagayo), all four major promotions in the country set box office records during the past year.

The big show concept has taken over from the nightly touring house show as the key event. In the U.S., the big shows are in the form of PPV events. Titan and the NWA each ran five, with mixed results. But certainly several of the best PPV shows of all-time were during 1989. Most notable were the NWA shows, particularly with the Starrcade '88, Chitown Rumble, Music City Showdown and the Baltimore Bash shows in succession.

With more and more homes equipped to pick up PPV shows (up to more than 13 million at the end of 1989, or more than double of what it was in 1987 when the WWF promoted Wrestlemania III), Titan was able to derive more-and-more revenue from this end of the business. The total Wrestlemania V gross, combining the house show in Atlantic City (which set a U.S. record with a \$1,628,000 gate), closed-circuit (\$3 million) and PPV (\$16.3 million) set a new pro wrestling record of nearly \$21 million (and with later videotape sales, overseas sales and gimmicks the total revenue was closer to \$25 million generated, although Titan itself probably saw less than half of that). The gross from the subsequent Summer Slam and Survivor Series was in excess of \$11 million and \$7 million respectively.

While the WWF could brag of setting PPV records, the NWA's bragging point was the quality of its PPV shows. In particular, its main event matches not only on PPV, but also on its televised Clash specials were some of the best matches of the decade. With its long-time champion and standard-bearer Ric Flair in his eighth year as focal star, and with his highest calibre of opponents in years, it seemed that every big show was headlined by a match of the year candidate.

In Japan the big show concept was just as prevalent. While house show business bottomed out for the women's group, they still set a record on May 6 with Chigusa Nagayo's retirement card in Yokohama drawing a women's record \$521,000 house. All Japan, which figured to be the group that would suffer the most in 1989, hung in strong, packing them in for several major shows, and setting its company gate record of more than \$700,000 when it packed Tokyo's Budokan Hall on June 5 with a Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu match. New Japan set a pro wrestling gate record of \$2,781,000 from a Japanese-record 53,800 fans on April 24 at Tokyo's Egg Dome (breaking the WWF's live gate record set three weeks earlier for the live show of Wrestlemania in Atlantic City), and that record was broken on November 29

by the UWF with a \$3,300,000 gate in the same venue for a sold out crowd of 60,000.

And as 1990 begins, the two leading promotions from a business standpoint remain the two opposite groups, the WWF in the U.S. and UWF in Japan.

The WWF has a front office staff in the hundreds. The UWF has less than a dozen. The WWF will run more than 600 live events in 1990. The UWF will run maybe a dozen. The WWF relies almost exclusively on gimmickry, while the UWF abhors it. While wrestling is called sports entertainment, there is very little that isn't sport about the UWF (except the matches themselves are works just the same), and very little that is entertainment. The opposite can be said about the WWF. The WWF's success is mainly due to television, about 250 syndicated stations and occasional network coverage by NBC. The WWF is built around Hulk Hogan, a man with great physical charisma and, at best, fair wrestling talent. The UWF is built around Akira Maeda, a man with very limited physical charisma but a lot of wrestling talent. The UWF has virtually no television coverage. But both groups smashed box office records in 1989.

In December, our impromptu editorial board selected the 10 biggest news stories of this past year.

1. UWF SMASHES BOX OFFICE RECORDS AT THE TOKYO DOME

Going into 1989, there were many that considered the Universal Wrestling Federation's initial success as something of a flash-in-the-pan. While continued sellouts this year quieted that talk somewhat, the question in a lot of people's mind was just how much potential box office power does the UWF have.

Late in the year the group took its ultimate gamble. It booked a show on November 29 at the Tokyo Dome. While New Japan was extremely successful in April in running a show in the same building, that show had a lot of mainstream novelty because it marked the first Soviet athletes to compete as professionals in any sport in Japan.

While the UWF had been successful in selling out Tokyo's Budokan Hall (15,000 seats, \$750,000), the Osaka Baseball Stadium (23,000, \$1,714,000) and the new Yokohama Arena (17,000, \$1,409,000) earlier in the year, and all shows sold out well in advance, this show was on a completely different scale.

First off, the group was running out of viable big show matches. Its two biggest stars, Akira Maeda and Nobuhiko Takada, had met several times on big shows, including the Budokan Hall show in January and again in Nagoya in June. Yoshiaki Fujiwara jumped before the Osaka show, and his match with Maeda headlined in Yokohama, but he had lost to Takada in Nagano in late September. Kazuo Yamazaki had already wrestled both Maeda and Takada on numerous occasions.

There was no doubt outside talent from other sports would be used. The UWF's initial success which blew everyone's mind came on August 13, 1988 when Maeda's match against karate champ Gerard Gordeau of the Netherlands sold out the 12,000-seat Ariake Coliseum to the tune of \$500,000 on the first day tickets went on sale. The Osaka baseball stadium show saw Maeda go against sambo wrestling legend Chris Dolman.

But while the lure of mixed matches, which the public believed to be "shooting" matches as well, was going to be the key in drawing the crowd, if the UWF wrestlers them-

selves weren't "over" to a great degree, people wouldn't have cared about the matches.

The group was going for all the box office records this time. The foreign competitors' names started to get leaked in September, and were officially announced by the end of the month. But tickets weren't put on sale. A few weeks later the complete line-up for the show, headlined by six pro wrestler vs. combat athlete from another sport matches were announced. But tickets weren't put on sale.

Tickets were announced as going on sale on November 5, held back to specifically try and do the "impossible," sell out the Tokyo Dome in one day.

The line started forming about four days earlier for tickets. When UWF president Shinji Jin and Maeda had a press conference on November 4 to hype the ticket sales, there were already more people in line for tickets at the Tokyo Dome box office than there were ringside seats.

No, the Tokyo Dome didn't sell out in one day. Officially, the ringside seats (\$210) sold out in about five minutes, all to people who had been in line for four days or more. By the 30 minute mark, the box office had taken in more than \$1.5 million. When the first day sales were over, 40,000 tickets had been sold.

When all was said and done, the UWF's live gate of \$2,896,000 million broke New Japan's record set earlier in the year in the same building and was more than double the U.S. record set at Wrestlemania V. The crowd of 60,000 for wrestling was the largest ever in Japan, and third largest of all-time (trailing WWF promoted shows at the Pontiac Silverdome in 1987 which drew 90,817 and at Toronto's Exhibition Stadium in 1986 which drew 69,300). While all nine closed-circuit locations throughout Japan didn't sell out, all did big business, adding another \$1.6 million to the coffers. When throwing in merchandising sales, the whole show grossed an incredible \$5.6 million.



Ricky and Richie Steamboat

It would be nice to say that it was also the greatest card of all-time, but that would hardly be accurate. The very idea of a mixed match being worked means that one of the people involved will have virtually no concept of what to do or psychology of when to do it. While they all may have been killers in their own sport, that means nothing in a pro wrestling ring when the action is choreographed and it's not how well you can beat someone up, but how well you appear to beat someone up and how dramatic you portray it that counts.

In fact, funny as it sounds, it was the glitz and overall production which outshone the wrestling itself. Between laser light shows and special effects, the show "seemed"

spectacular, even though the wrestling itself was sorely lacking.

Officially, Maeda made Willie Wilhelm (former Olympic judo participant from the Netherlands) submit in the main event; Takada made Duane Koslowski (1988 U.S. Olympian in Greco-Roman wrestling) submit; Dolman made Yamazaki submit; Fujiwara made Dick Leon-Fry (kick-boxer from the Netherlands) submit; Maurice Smith (World Karate Association World heavyweight champion) knocked out Minoru Suzuki; Yoji Anjo drew with Campuir Davy (Thai-style kick boxing welterweight champion) and Tatsuo Nakano drew with Shigeo Miyato in UWF style pro wrestling.

2. JOSE GONZALES ACQUITTED IN BRODY MURDER CASE, RETURNS TO THE RING AS A HERO

The biggest individual news story in the wrestling world last year was the stabbing death of pro wrestling legend Bruiser Brody. The trial of the wrestler accused of the murder of Brody was one of the biggest stories of this year.

A year-and-a-half later, the events which took place on July 16, 1988 in the bathroom of a dressing room at Juan Lou-briel Stadium in Bayamon, Puerto Rico are an unexplained as they were when they happened.

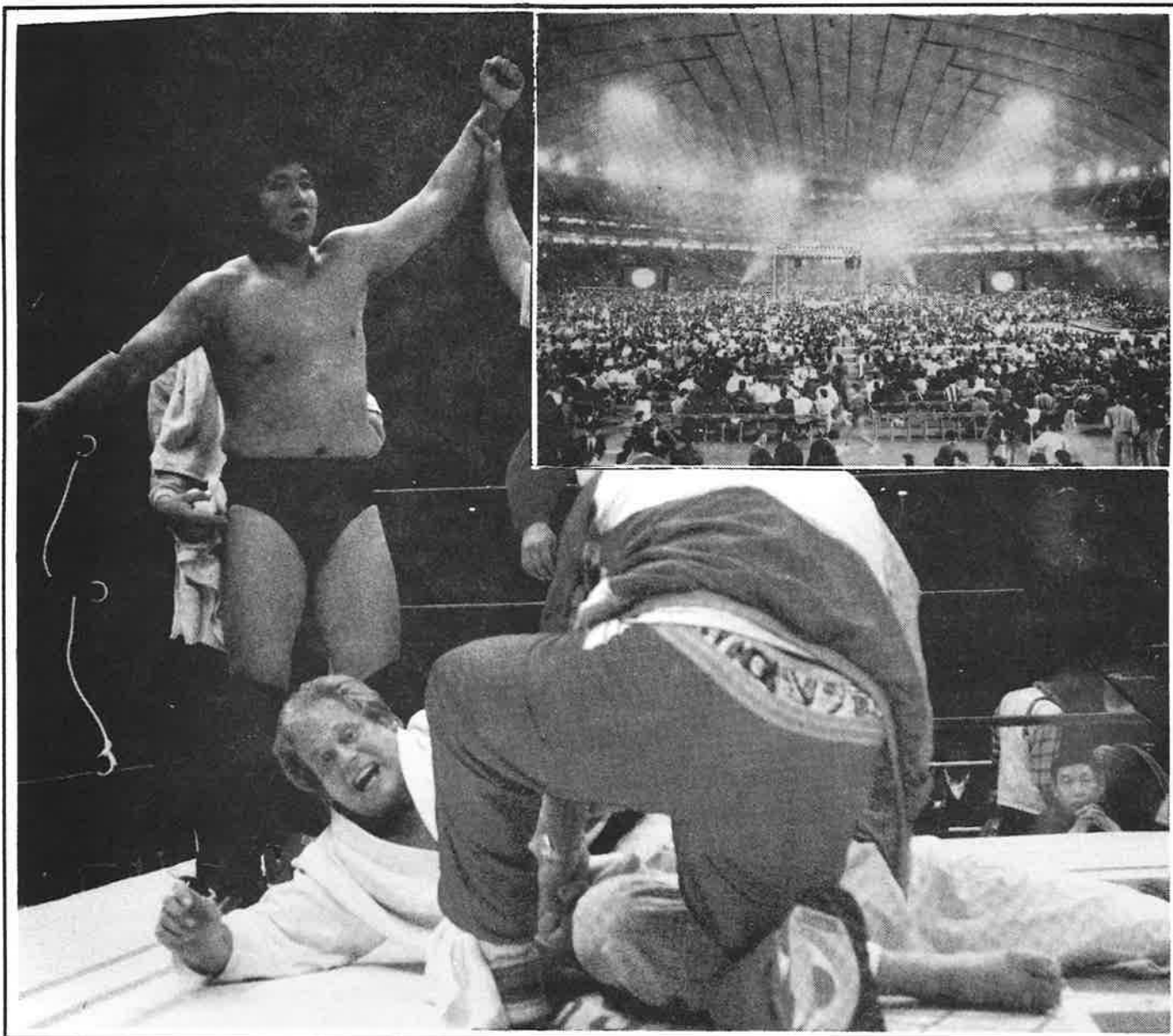
Jose Huertas Gonzales, the booker for the World Wrestling Council and one of its top babyfaces under the ring name of Invader #1, called Frank Goodish, better known as Bruiser Brody, into the bathroom for a private conversation. Seconds later the wrestlers heard screams, the door was open, and blood was pouring out of Goodish's side. Gonzales left the building amidst commotion with a blood-stained shirt and went home. The murder weapon, a large knife, disappeared while this was going on. Gonzales came back a short while later and wrestled his match on the card. Goodish was taken to the hospital, where he died at 4 a.m. the next morning.

There were more than a dozen witnesses in the dressing room to what happened. Americans Tony Atlas and Mark and Chris Youngblood were in the dressing room, while Dutch Mantell had just stepped out of the dressing room to take a peak at the crowd. Also in the dressing room were Puerto Rican wrestlers TNT (Juan Rivera), Miguelito Perez, Hurricane Castillo Jr. and his father, retired wrestler Hurricane Castillo Sr., Invader #2 (Roberto Soto) and wrestler-owners Carlitos Colon and Victor Jovica.

In the aftermath, many of the U.S. wrestlers left the promotion, including all four (Atlas, Youngbloods and Mantell) who shared the babyface dressing room that night with Gonzales and Brody. Gonzales showed up the next day in Mayaguez to work the card, which had sold out, but the show had to be canceled when several of the U.S. wrestlers didn't show up. A few days later the wrestlers demanded to Colon to tell them if Gonzales was still a part of the company. Colon said that he wasn't.

By the fall, several wrestlers, including some friends of Brody's like Chris Adams, Eddie and Tommy Gilbert and Terry Funk worked shows in Puerto Rico, to be shocked to find out that Gonzales was in the dressing room, giving finishes.

At the same time, on the Capitol Sports television shows, Gonzales, who wasn't wrestling actively at the time, was pushed on television as a family man. Although Gonzales' reputation with the wrestling fans suffered initially when the news reports listed his name as the assailant, the constant Capitol propaganda was enough to turn him back "babyface" in the eyes of the wrestling fans, going into the trial.



The trial on first degree murder charges and a weapons violation took place in January. The result was a not guilty verdict. Gonzales returned to the ring several weeks later back in his role as the No. 2 babyface in the promotion. The jury wasn't convinced that Gonzales wasn't acting in self defense.

The verdict would have gone down a lot easier within the wrestling world except for several factors. The main witness, Atlas, didn't appear for the trial. Although the police in Puerto Rico attempted to have a "body attachment" placed on Atlas, in which case he could be actually extradited from the U.S. to Puerto Rico and forced to testify, somehow the body attachment order never was filed. Atlas himself, who immediately after the murder had gone into detail to two different wrestling reporters about what happened, describing the incident as cold-blooded murder, failed to testify claiming a death threat was put out against him.

The Youngbloods, who also failed to testify, had left the island immediately after the murder. Just a few weeks after the trial, they returned, and on their first night back with the promotion, won the group's tag team championship.

Mantell, who wouldn't have been a key witness because he was actually out of the dressing room at the time of the stabbing, had agreed to testify. His plane tickets for the trial arrived after the trial had already been completed.

Gonzales himself never took the witness stand. The testimony in the trial came primarily from Colon and Jovica, Gonzales' partners in the Capitol Sports company. Both claimed Gonzales was acting in self defense, and tried to paint Brody's condition as being drug-crazed because they

claimed he was carrying marijuana in his gym bag when the incident took place.

Since Gonzales' return, his alter ego, Invader #1, has been a fixture on the top of the Capitol Sports cards. Right after the verdict came in, once again several foreign wrestlers left the island. But others were brought in to take their place, and it was business as usual to an extent. However, the number of big-name performers that ventured to Puerto Rico during this past year was far less than in the past and overall business was its weakest in years.

3. STEAMBOAT RETURNS, CAPTURES NWA TITLE, THEN LEAVES PROMOTION

One of the most accomplished wrestlers during the decade of the 80s has been Richard Blood, better known as Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat.

If one was to have made predictions at this time ten years ago as to which wrestlers would dominate the decade of the 80s, Steamboat would be at the top of that list. He had already established himself as one of the top in-ring performers, paced by his legendary feud with Ric Flair in the late 70s which helped turn the Mid-Atlantic area into what many would call the top wrestling promotion in the continent. His babyface demeanor, good looks and bodybuilding champion physique (a rarity in those days among wrestlers) had made him a big hit not only in the Carolinas and Virginia, but also in Ontario, Canada and in Japan.

Steamboat was one of the top performers of the decade, but it wasn't nearly as smooth as one would have imagined.

While Steamboat headlined frequently as a single, during the early part of the decade he was best known for his stints as NWA tag team champion with the late Jay Youngblood. Shortly after the first Starrcade, Steamboat announced his retirement on television to open up a bodybuilding gym in his hometown of Charlotte, N.C. The retirement was partially hype, since he was specific in leaving the door open for a comeback to win the NWA title. It was a very short time later that Steamboat returned for another series with Flair. One of the matches, on May 29, 1984, headlined the NWA's first-ever card in the New York City area at the Meadowlands.

When Dusty Rhodes became booker of the NWA, he phased Steamboat down in order to push his own friend, Terry Allen (Magnum T.A.) as the pretty boy babyface. Steamboat wound up in early 1985 going to the WWF.

Steamboat's three-year WWF reign was highlighted by his famous match against Randy Savage as part of Wrestlemania III from the Pontiac Silverdome before the record sellout crowd of 90,000+. That win gained Steamboat the No. 2 title in the WWF, the Intercontinental. But the reign was short-lived, as six weeks later he lost the title to the Honkeytonk Man. At that point, Steamboat took a leave of absence as his wife, Bonnie, was about to give birth to the couple's first child. He came back as an emergency sub when Jake Roberts, who was scheduled to be a headliner at Madison Square Garden with Honkeytonk Man, was suspended. Although he was never pushed hard again on television, he remained in key spots on the card until leaving the promotion after Wrestlemania IV.

In one of the first major moves of the Turner regime, Steamboat was lured out of his nine-month-long retirement and brought in to work a program with Flair.

The first meeting was at the old TBS studios in early January. Steamboat came out as Eddie Gilbert's "mystery" partner against Flair and Barry Windham. He pinned Flair to prop himself into the position as Flair's opponent on the Feb. 20 PPV event from Chicago.

Buoyed by the return of his "favorite" opponent, Flair got into the best physical condition of his career. The two relived old times by having the best matches found anywhere on the planet.

Steamboat captured the title in the Chicago meeting. Then the two went throughout the country to rave reviews at house shows. The gates were hardly astronomical for the matches. But judged against today's NWA standards, the box office power of this feud may have been underestimated at the time.

But while the matches themselves were great, Steamboat faced an unexpected problem upon his return. He chose a gimmick, "the family man" image, using his wife Bonnie and son Richard Jr. as part of his ring entrances. Whatever psychological reason one will choose to explain the crowds reaction, this ultra-babyface persona backfired to a significant percentage of the crowd. Part of it was Flair's extreme popularity, even though a heel. But part of it also was that the NWA's crowds at the time were so narrow demographically, and the group that was attending to a significant degree wasn't reacting favorably to the portrayal. In fact, on the night Steamboat won the title, in a match that will go down in wrestling history, the crowd started sizably pro-Flair. As the match went on, Steamboat won the crowd over. There was a thunderous ovation when the title changed. However, when Steamboat brought his son into the ring after the title

change, the change in the crowd from thunderous cheers to boos couldn't be ignored.

If Steamboat's inability to "get over" as a strong face bothered him, it was never evident by his performance in the ring. If anything, the Chicago match was equalled, if not topped, by a 55-minute thriller on a TBS special on April 2 in New Orleans. And equalled again, if not topped by the final meeting, on May 7 in Nashville, on which night Flair regained the title.

Steamboat then entered into a program with Lex Luger after an angle shot on June 14 in Fort Bragg turned Luger heel. Once again, Luger, despite being the heel, got the majority of the crowd support in these matches. But many would also say that these matches were the turning point in Luger's career. Luger went from a fair worker pushed more because of his physique, to the most improved all-around worker in the business and acknowledged as the favorite to be the sport's top star of the next decade.

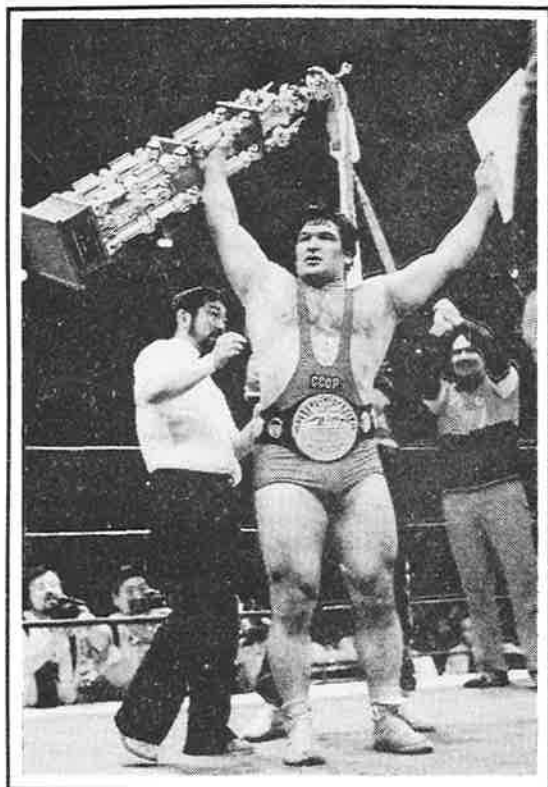
While all this was going on, Steamboat's NWA contract, which was a short-term deal, was due to expire at the end of July. Both sides negotiated a one-year deal, in which Steamboat would work four dates per week, but the sides were far apart on monetary terms. Steamboat's side felt that considering the quality of his work during his six months in, that he should be paid "not as much as Flair, but more than Sting." Management felt otherwise, claiming he wasn't the big draw they were expecting, although nobody even attempted to deny the calibre of his actual work. As July wore on, the two sides got closer. At one point they were just \$10,000 apart on an annual figure. At that point, Steamboat agreed to work the month of August for a nightly fee if the contract wasn't signed by the end of the month, and to continue negotiating. But Jim Herd changed the offer as the two sides were near a verbal deal, lowering the offer nearly \$50,000. This was actually several days before the Baltimore Bash, and from that point it seemed likely that the two sides would part at the end of the month. In many people's eyes, Steamboat's respect as a performer grew, because most, in what was really lame duck status, would hardly be expected to give that something extra to a company when the two sides were to part company on less than amicable grounds. But during his last week in the NWA, Steamboat and Luger had three of the best matches of the year.

On the PPV show, the finish of the match, with Steamboat losing via DQ for using a chair, heated up the Luger feud that much more. Ironically, coming out of Baltimore, because of the way the match went, Steamboat probably would have had his most popularity had he stayed on. The company was advertising Steamboat for matches in August, but Steamboat was so soured by the way the negotiations went, that he canceled his August matches, and a program was created in haste for Luger with Tommy Rich.

4. SOVIET WRESTLERS TURN PRO

In the category of something that a few years ago had absolutely no chance of ever happening, this past year saw some of the first legitimate Soviet athletes that entered professional sports do so as wrestlers.

The multi-million dollar negotiations, set up between Hisashi Shinma (Antonio Inoki's long-time business manager) and the Soviet Sports Committee, resulted in five-time amateur World champion Salman Hashimikov, another amateur World champion, Victor Zangiev and Vladimir Berkovich making their pro debuts in an exhibition on February 22 at the Tokyo Sumo Hall.



Salman Hashimikov

The February date predated any of the Soviet ice hockey or basketball players turning professional, although a Soviet soccer player actually beat out the wrestlers as the first.

Several other Soviets, including 1972 Olympic judo gold medalist Shota Chochyashvili, former sambo wrestling and judo champion Habieli Victashev and amateur wrestlers Chimur Zarasov and Wahka Eveloev followed the three as the year wore on.

It was a tough transition for the Soviets to the pro ring. Not only had they never wrestled professional style before, but none of them had ever even seen a pro wrestling match on television until their country made the deal. In addition, there was a language barrier between the Soviets and their Japanese trainers. Several Japanese wrestlers, including Masa Saito, Riki Choshu, Hiroshi Hase, Antonio Inoki and Shinya Hashimoto toured the Soviet Union to tutor the Russians in the rudimentary fundamentals of pro wrestling.

Still, green is green. While some of the Russians, Zarasov, Zangiev and Hashimikov in particular, were able to do some unique suplex maneuvers, by the end of 1989, none were even remotely skilled in transition or pro wrestling psychology.

Hashimikov gained a footnote in pro wrestling history, however. His official pro debut was on the April 24 card at the Tokyo Dome, and just one month later, on May 25 in Osaka, he captured the IWGP World heavyweight title from Big Van Vader, which no doubt is the quickest anyone has ever won a major World title from their pro debut. Hashimikov proved he was at least carryable, as he had good matches before the year was out against Vader and Riki Choshu. He wound up losing the IWGP strap to Choshu on July 12 in Osaka.

Of the Soviets, Zangiev appeared to be the one with the most pro potential. One wonders if he'll stay interested and relations between the Soviets and New Japan will stay on good terms for long enough for the Soviet Union to develop its first great worker.

This is led to another milestone, on Dec. 31, 1989, when the first pro wrestling card ever in the Soviet Union took place. The New Japan promoted show drew 12,000 fans to Lenin Stadium in Moscow, headlined by Antonio Inoki & Shota Chochyashvili (1972 gold medalist in judo and Inoki's foe on the Tokyo Dome card) beating Masa Saito & Brad Rheingans (both of who were former Olympic games competitors).



Terry Funk

5. TERRY FUNK SIGNS WITH NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

With the 80s now history and all the decade reviews being written, it seems to be a pretty clear consensus that Ric Flair will be remembered as the most outstanding wrestler of the decade.

But what about the 70s? There are several candidates. Some might say names like Jack Brisco, Nick Bockwinkel, Harley Race, Dory Funk Jr., Billy Robinson and maybe even Ric Flair. A name who certainly belongs in that list, maybe even at the top, is Terry Funk.

Funk was a main eventer throughout the 70s, held the NWA World's title, was a top attraction in Japan, and even co-starred in a major motion picture. His retirement from wrestling in 1983 in Tokyo was probably the most impressive pro wrestling retirement show in history, setting what was then an indoor gate record.

Funk's first retirement lasted a little over one year, before he returned to Japan. He continued to tour Japan on a regular basis through 1987, when injuries to his knees and back seemed to end his career.

But after taking several months off to rest, and spending hours daily in Gold's Gym to get his bodyweight down, Funk started taking independent dates from time-to-time. By early 1989, he had his body trained to its best condition of his career. Spurred on by a statement by Shohei "Giant" Baba, when Baba was asked why the Funks weren't in the 1988 tag team tournament, Funk decided to prove the prevailing wisdom wrong that his days as a main eventer were behind him.

When Dusty Rhodes went down to Florida, Funk worked a few shots as his main event foe. At about the same time, Jim Herd, the executive Vice President of the National Wrestling Alliance, decided upon a gimmick of bringing in all the living ex-NWA World champions for a televised card in New Orleans. Funk originally balked at the idea, feeling that if fans saw him alongside the older, retired legends like Buddy Rogers, Pat O'Connor, Gene Kiniski and Lou Thesz, that they would consider him as part of their era, and too old to be a main star today. But his mind changed, and he even did the color commentary for the main event on the show, the Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat match from New Orleans.

The folks in the NWA were impressed by the condition Funk was in. His reputation as one of the great workers of all-time didn't hurt. But the key in the decision to bring Funk back was the departure of Barry Windham, who was being groomed as the lead heel and the man to turn Ric Flair babyface. With the Flair turn imminent, the NWA needed a strong heel. The decision to pick Funk was considered somewhat of a risk, with his age and history of injuries a factor, but his reputation and ability outweighed them.

The angle to return Funk to the mainstream and immediately place him as the top heel in wrestling, and at the same time turn Flair, took place on May 7th in Nashville.

Funk was one of three ex-NWA champions (O'Connor and Thesz were the other two) picked to judge the Flair vs. Steamboat match on pay-per-view television from Nashville on May 7th. After Flair pinned Steamboat to win the title in a classic match, Funk came into the ring to challenge Flair to a title match. When Flair refused, citing Funk's inactivity over the past several years, Funk sucker-punched him and pounded him into the Nashville pavement.

With Flair "injured" for most of the summer, the NWA became the Terry Funk show. His interviews were the highlight of the television shows. In the ring, nobody was disappointed, either. But trouble struck before the first Flair vs. Funk match in Baltimore in the form of a broken sacrum (tailbone).

The Baltimore show, headlined by Flair vs. Funk, drew a sellout in the Baltimore Arena of 12,300 fans and \$190,000, plus another \$2.3 million in PPV revenue. The gate figure was almost triple the largest gate the NWA had drawn in 1989. The PPV figure was considered successful, especially considering the NWA's TV ratings at the time were at an all-time low. The two followed in rematches for the first month, which was the NWA's best house run of the year, climaxing in three crowds of more than 9,000 at the Omni in Atlanta.

But most people will remember Funk in 1989 for the November 15 match in Troy, New York. The "I Quit" match. The feud that began with a handshake, was going to end with a handshake. While most fans didn't know that this was supposed to be Funk's last match, Funk knew, and he and Flair did some of the best interviews of the year to hype the card. The 3.34 million homes and 7.3 million viewers watching the "I Quit" match rivalled the March 27, 1988 Flair vs. Sting match as the most watched match in the history of cable television. It can be debated that it was also



Antonio Inoki

the best match ever on cable television. Even without being allowed to use blood, the two put on one of the more vicious and brutal-appearing matches of recent memory. When it was over, Funk shook Flair's hand, was attacked after the match and turned babyface, and a few weeks later on TBS, announced another retirement to become a TV broadcaster.

6. ANTONIO INOKI RETIRES, ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT

When the book on the life of Antonio Inoki is finally written, it may be the most interesting wrestling book of them all.

From the start, Inoki was groomed for stardom after being discovered by the late Rikidozan in 1960. But like Akira Maeda who would follow him a generation later, nothing but the top spot would satisfy Inoki.

In the mid-60s, Inoki quit the established Japanese Wrestling Association and started his own promotion at a time when the common knowledge in wrestling was that Japan was too small a country to support more than one wrestling promotion.

His first effort failed, and he was back with the JWA before long. A few years later, when his attempt to gain the top spot from Giant Baba failed, he became Baba's bitter promotional rival with the forming of the New Japan promotion.

New Japan, with Inoki on top, had its peaks and valleys over the next two decades. When it was hot, like in 1982, it was as hot as any pro wrestling promotion in recent history. But it often wasn't hot, and that was often depending upon public opinion of Inoki, its top star and leading draw.

Unlike most Japanese wrestlers, Inoki was never satisfied with being a legend in his own country. While some may question his actual ability in the ring, Inoki achieved a level of national prominence that probably no pro wrestler of this generation has, with all due respect to Hulk Hogan and Akira Maeda.

Inoki was the most famous pro wrestler in Japan, and with the exception of Rikidozan, in the country's history. He was also one of its most popular and most highly paid athletes. But it was never enough.

In the early 70s, seeking the stardom in the United States that he was never able to achieve, Inoki purchased the National Wrestling Federation from Pedro Martinez, a group based in the Cleveland area. Inoki instilled himself as World champion, but couldn't draw, and the group went belly-up.

A few years later, Inoki pulled off what appeared to be his biggest coup, but instead turned out to be one of his most damaging. He signed Muhammad Ali, the legendary boxer, to a mixed match in the summer of 1976. About every that could go wrong with that promotion did go wrong. The first closed-circuit wrestling card was hardly a box office bonanza. It was an idea nearly a decade ahead of its time. Not only did pro wrestling not have enough popularity to draw from the mainstream at the time, but Inoki had virtually no name appeal in the United States. The boxing fans weren't interested either, even though Ali had considerable

appeal, because they considered wrestling's dubious image to mean the event would be fixed.

It would have been better off had it been fixed, because it turned out to be broken. Talks broke down between the two over who would win the match and how it would be worked. It wound up being a shoot, and a deathly boring shoot at that. Inoki, fearful of Ali's punches, rarely got off his back and his strategy consisted of kicking Ali in the back of the leg. Ali himself never got close enough to Inoki to do any damage, fearful of a martial arts attack, and threw something like six punches over 15 rounds. The coma-inducing draw was followed by a riot in Tokyo. Inoki's reputation, and the reputation of pro wrestling in Japan, suffered and it took years to rebuild.

Inoki's reputation for always coming back when it seemed like he was finished wasn't established yet. And recovering from the Ali fiasco wasn't the first, nor the last, in his long line of comebacks.

He recovered from publicly being labeled a thief and an embezzler, and later a phony. He recovered when his biggest box office star, Satoru Sayama, quit the promotion in 1983, and when a year later, his hottest young star, Riki Choshu, led a group of eleven wrestlers to defect. He even recovered from a pitiful performance in a mixed match against brain-dead boxer Leon Spinks.

At 46, it appeared Inoki's days of returning from the dead were just about over. He temporarily lost a power play with his long-time understudy, Tatsumi Fujinami, in 1988, but when Fujinami couldn't draw on his own at the spot shows, Inoki was back as the star. But it was obvious that his actual ability was waning and speculation of his retirement ran rampant.

Before Inoki retired, he put together one of his great promotional successes with the debut of the Soviets. After setting the gate record at the Tokyo Dome in April, and following it up in May with a half-dozen gates of more than \$250,000, it was time to retire a hero--into politics.

Inoki's retirement from wrestling to run for the upper house in the Japanese House of Councilors (equivalent to parliament or the U.S. senate) came out of nowhere. There was no fancy sendoff. No huge retirement show. He simply held a press conference, and a few days later announced before the start of the June tour that he'd be out of action because he was campaigning.

Inoki barely squeaked into office, capturing the 50th seat out of 50 open seats in the at-large election in late July. In doing so, he joined South Korea's Kim Ill in the ranks of pro wrestlers who have obtained high political office.

Inoki used his office to strengthen his name and image as a diplomat through international sports. He brought several Soviet boxers to Japan to train and promote in 1990. He opened up talks with Red China about bringing pro wrestling into their country in 1990, and training athletes from the country as wrestlers.

True to form, while Inoki got out of the daily wrestling business, turning over control of the New Japan company to Seiji Sakaguchi, he didn't leave wrestling behind. On the Sept. 20 card in Osaka, Inoki made an appearance as a special referee in a match between Big Van Vader and Bam Bam Bigelow. He was all set for a comeback in December, however a few weeks later, he was stabbed in an assassination attempt while giving a speech in Ashigawa.

Inoki's wrestling days aren't over yet. He finally returned to the ring on New Years Eve to headline the first wrestling

event in the Soviet Union. And he'll wrestle once again in Japan in February of 1990 at the Tokyo Dome.

7. TITAN RELEASES MOVIE "NO HOLDS BARRED"

For years it has been a common joke that wrestlers weren't athletes, but actors. And there's truth to that saying to some extent, since overacting, showmanship and interviews are more important than actual athletic ability in a wrestler being a top draw in the United States.

And the list of wrestlers who have made the transition to acting is a long one. From Hardboiled Haggerty to Mike Mazurki to Terry Funk to Roddy Piper to Gorgeous George to Keiji Muto, wrestlers have had major roles, including starring roles, in major motion pictures. This isn't to forget names like Mil Mascaras, El Santo and the Blue Demon in Mexico who capitalized on their wrestling fame to star in several adventure movies.

With Hulk Hogan the most popular wrestler and biggest box office draw on a national basis ever in U.S. pro wrestling, it was only natural he'd follow suit.

Enter "No Holds Barred." Vince McMahon's attempt to go from producer and director of pro wrestling matches to producer of a motion picture on the big screen.

The movie was made during the spring and early summer of 1988, and by late in the year, was shown to the movie companies for distribution. The companies, by and large, held their nose. All the major cinemas turned it down, stating the prevailing wisdom that wrestling movies don't do box office. Sylvester Stallone, at the peak of his popularity, did a wrestling movie with Terry Funk, and it was a box office disappointment. A few other horrible movies tried to capitalize on the pro wrestling media boom, none of which did any theater business. The prevailing wisdom was also that athletes don't do business at the movie box office, remembering Muhammad Ali, a man far more famous and with far more name recognition than Hogan, starring in a movie about his life which bombed.

But previous wrestling movies, and previous movies starring athletes didn't have a 250-station television network that would hype the movie to death, and beyond death.

New Line Cinema, seeing a bargain, picked up the movie and cut a deal so sweet they would make out even if the film bombed. The marginal success of "No Holds Barred" was more a coup for New Line, which got the right to the movie for nothing, and for theaters, which got a favorable deal to carry the movie initially, than for Titan, which was unable to convince anyone in the movie business of the power of their own television hype.

But even if the movie didn't make millions for Titan, and even if it was universally panned, the resulting publicity, if anything, made Hogan a bigger celebrity than he already was.

No Holds Barred, which opened in the summer, did about \$16 million in business. Not staggering, but certainly respectable. It established that Titan's television was strong enough to hype a movie to decent business, and that Hogan could draw at the theaters.

New Line was so pleased with the gate figures that it was willing to put up half the costs to produce another wrestling movie with Hogan. Walt Disney Productions was so impressed with Hogan's box office appeal to children that they wanted to sign him up to do kids movies.

The movie once again gave Hogan and Titan Sports a media barrage and more publicity. It strengthened Hogan's hand as a celebrity, and Titan's version of pro wrestling as somewhat mainstream entertainment and the "only" wrestling worth discussing.

8. TITAN "EXPOSES" BUSINESS TO ELIMINATE COMMISSIONS

Since seemingly the beginning of time, the No. 1 cardinal sin in the wrestling business has been a so-called kayfabe violation. That is, to admit that even the most patently choreographed or staged scenario within the world of pro wrestling was anything less than impromptu resulting from the heat of athletic competition.

This all goes back to what spawned today's pro wrestling, the carnival scene in the earlier part of the century. The wrestling mentality, as with the "carny" mentality, comes from the old P.T. Barnum theory that there's a sucker born every minute.

Wrestlers had their own little language, "carny," with key words like "babyface," for the good-guy, "heel," for the villain, "doing jobs," for losing and most of all, "mark," for the audience that they believed they were conning into buying tickets. The prevailing wisdom all along was that if the public ever believed pro wrestling to be show, and not pure sport, that the business would die.

The wrestling world has changed a great deal over the past decade. From Vince McMahon's turning the most well known American promotion into a full-fledged carnival with almost no athletic pretense, to greater media exposure, to admissions in public from wrestlers like Satoru Sayama in Japan and Eddie Mansfield and Jim Wilson in the U.S. that matches are staged and the winners and loser pre-determined.

How has all of this affected the wrestling business? It grew bigger and bigger. Proof that exposing the business didn't hurt business should have been clear when ABC's 20/20 ripped pro wrestling in early 1985, and business increased.

But the whole idea that exposing the business was the ultimate sin remains prevalent throughout the industry.

Also since the beginning of time, in most states, pro wrestling has been under the auspices of athletic commissions. In most states these commissions do almost no regulatory actions regarding wrestling. They collect a percentage of the gate, generally five percent, as tax money, and use it to fund regulation of pro boxing matches. Commissioners are appointed not for their background in wrestling, but generally as a patronage job to reward those with political favors coming. The rule books in many of the states are so archaic that even with the laxest enforcement, today's pro wrestling couldn't exist.

For example, in New York, and in most other states, it is illegal for a promoter to have any financial interest in any wrestler on his card. In Washington, it is illegal for a wrestler to do anything less than his best effort in attempting to win a match. And on and on it goes.

Most of those within the wrestling business have hated the commissions, and at times, have worked against their existence.

A few years back, Titan Sports declared "war" on athletic commissions throughout the United States. They were tired of the limited regulatory interference. They were tired of being forced in certain states to use local referees and ring announcers when they had their own personnel to do those

jobs. And probably most of all, tired of paying commission taxes on the live gates.

In January, while lobbying to eliminate the commission in New Jersey, officials from Titan Sports admitted that pro wrestling was nothing more than staged entertainment. They admitted the participants do everything in their power to avoid hurting one another. And they admitted that the winners and losers are pre-determined. They claimed that while "other" promotions in the past have had wrestlers use razor blades to cut their foreheads, that the WWF would never permit its wrestlers to do such a thing as they were in the business of family entertainment (which was a blatant lie).

While Titan did this to eliminate regulation, no doubt the company had no idea what the net result of all this would be. When the New York Times decided to run the story in the front page of the newspaper, all the other media followed suit. It was treated as a major news item throughout the country. The doomsayers were livid. Everyone knows the scam and business will die. Even those within the Titan office, which had no idea going in of how big the media would play up the story, were worried. While none of the Titan wrestlers would have dared say so in public, many of them felt hurt and betrayed the actions of their front office. The wrestlers and office personnel in the other promotions were far more vehement in their reactions. Many tried to point the finger at Titan and say something to the effect of, "See, this is what we've been trying to tell you all along. Their wrestling is nothing but a show. But here in the (AWA, CWA, fill in the blank), we have "real" wrestling."

The reaction of the wrestlers is understandable. Their belief, and to an extent, it is a correct belief, is that the public will never understand the difference between "fake" and whatever the correct term to describe what goes on in a pro wrestling match really is. However, what some, in their insulated wrestling world failed to realize, is that it's only a small percentage of those in the real world that believed pro wrestling to be pure sport anyway. But understandably so in many cases, the wrestlers felt these admissions would lead to them being labeled as shams and non-athletes. Since many of the wrestlers are good athletes, the latter label hurt from a pride standpoint. And the term "fake" raises the ire of most wrestlers because of the very real bumps, bruises and often serious injuries that occur in the ring.

Titan itself, the company that made the admissions, followed this up by probably its best quarter ever in terms of gate receipts.

Before the year was out, Titan had also eliminated the commissions in California and Pennsylvania, but failed to eliminate the New Jersey commission. The fight continues in several other states, and no doubt will, for years to come.

9. LEGENDARY WRESTLING PROMOTER PAUL BOESCH PASSES AWAY

(Reprinted from March 20, 1989 issue of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter)

Paul Boesch, a name synonymous with the term "Houston Wrestling," passed away in early March at his home in Sugarland, TX after a sudden heart attack at the age of 76.

Boesch, whose career in wrestling included lengthy stints as a wrestler, television announcer and promoter, was involved in the wrestling industry for more than 55 years. Both inside and outside the wrestling fraternity, he was recognized as, with the possible exception of Sam Muchnick of St. Louis, as the most popular promoter in the modern era of wrestling.

A native of the Bronx in New York, Boesch began wrestling in 1932 and had his first main event three months later. His career as an active wrestler lasted through the late 40s, with an interruption for World War II, where he was a decorated war hero. He finally settled down in Houston and became the television announcer and promotional assistant for Morris Siegel. When Siegel passed away in 1967, Boesch bought the promotion from Siegel's widow and remained as the leading promoter in Houston until his retirement on August 28, 1987. The retirement ended a short, bitter relationship with the World Wrestling Federation, brought on by ill feelings by Boesch who claimed he wasn't kept informed of the sale of the Universal Wrestling Federation to Jim Crockett Promotions.

Boesch made a brief return to wrestling as a figurehead member of the NWA Board of Governors in 1988, and helped with the NWA in promoting a few shows in Houston, but his association ended by summer-time when the NWA pulled out of running regular shows in Houston due to dwindling crowds.

Boesch played basketball in high school, but left school after two years to help with family bills due to the depression. He worked as a lifeguard during the summer and a gym instructor in the winter prior to breaking into pro wrestling. He also played pro basketball with the original Boston Celtics and semi-pro basketball and placed third in the North Atlantic Coast lifeguard competition in 1932.

While he never held a major wrestling championship as an active wrestler, he received several World title shots, particularly while in Texas during the reign of "Wild" Bill Longson. He wrestled most of the major names in the 30s and 40s such as Lou Thesz, Gorgeous George, Gus Sonnenberg, The Dusek Brothers and "Dirty" Dick Rains. While wrestling in Portland in 1935, he occasionally worked as a color commentator on the radio broadcasts with Rollie Truitt.

Boesch's wrestling career was interrupted in 1942 when he volunteered for service in the Army during World War II. During his army tenure he was awarded a silver star and cluster, a bronze star and cluster, a purple heart and cluster, a French Croix de Guerre with a star, a Combat Infantryman's badge, a Distinguished Unit Citation and Three Battle Stars. He was later awarded the Distinguished Citizen award by the 121st Infantry Association.

After the war, Boesch wrestled in New Zealand, and then in Texas. It was in Texas that he achieved his greatest success as the controversial master of the "sleep" (now called sleeper) hold. His career was cut short in 1947 by an automobile accident. While recuperating, he started working in the office for Siegel and in 1948 started doing wrestling play-by-play on radio station KLEE in Houston. When KLEE received a television license in 1949, the wrestling moved to television and Boesch became best known for his work as long-time host of the show, a position he maintained uninterrupted for 39 years, mainly with KHTV (Cb. 39).

In Houston, Boesch may have been best remembered outside of wrestling for his appearances in a long running ad for I.W. Marks jewelers. Boesch wore earrings with his distinctive cauliflower ears to gain attention for the local jeweler.

Boesch's 21 years as a promoter in Houston included affiliations with Southwest Sports (now USWA), Southwest Championship Wrestling, independent affiliations, and he gained his most success working with Bill Watts' Mid South (later UWF) wrestling before his brief affiliation with the WWF. The early 80s, while promoting in combination with Watts' Mid South organization, were the high point and most profitable years for Boesch's organization, with much of the

behind-the-scenes work handled by his nephew, Peter Birkholz.

When Mid South became the UWF, and eventually was sold to the NWA in April of 1987, Boesch, whose relationship with Watts turned quite bitter at the end, opened the door to negotiations with Vince McMahon. McMahon closed the deal in record time. But the four-month affiliation with Titan proved to be an even more bitter pill for Boesch to swallow than the final months with Watts. Claiming McMahon reneged on every promise he made in their original deal and believing McMahon was trying to get him out of the picture, Boesch announced he was retiring as a promoter and had a farewell show before a then-record 12,000 fans at the Sam Houston Coliseum.

Boesch also wrote three books, a hardback called "Road to Hurtgen" in 1962 about his experiences during World War II, a poetry book called "Much of Me in These" in 1966 and just before his death had completed a book called, "Hey Boy! Where'd you get them ears!" a very informative book about the history of pro wrestling, that as yet hasn't been published.

The above would constitute a normal, impersonal obituary for Paul Boesch. Now I'd like to share some memories with you about the Paul Boesch that I knew.

I first became acquainted with Boesch in 1986, shortly after the death of Gino Hernandez. Hernandez, who had been a top heel in Texas, had just passed away of a cocaine overdose at the age of 28. He was like a son to Boesch.

The one thing that always stuck in my mind about Boesch was the quote from former pro wrestler Gerald Brisco, who said that, "If every promoter in wrestling was like Paul Boesch, this would be the greatest business in the world."

We exchanged letters and phone calls on an infrequent basis. My own perception, although he would never say so, was that while he liked reading the Observer and myself personally, I don't think he liked the idea of a kayfabe newsletter. He grew up and lived this business in a different era, and the idea that someone would even insinuate wrestling was anything but pure sport was a crime against the business he loved. It personally hurt him to see the changes that were made within the wrestling business over the past four or five years. While he admired Vince McMahon as a promoter for his ability to get wrestling on network television and for drawing more than 90,000 fans to the Silverdome, he hated what McMahon did to the product. In his final year or two of promoting, he felt that promoting was no longer fun. His idea was that the fans were the people he had to please as a promoter and genuinely felt bad about bad matches or no-shows or problems with the card. He hated the notion that those who promoted nowadays had of fans being nothing but statistical numbers.

I recall one time, after a fairly bad house, he phoned me out of the blue. He told me about the house, then started giving excuses, one right after the other. The weather was bad. It was the end of the month and money was tight. The economy was bad of late. The TV show got moved back an hour the week before the card because the baseball game went into extra innings. We had to change the main event because a guy got hurt two weeks before the card. He had about 15 of them, reeling one off after another. Then came his list comment. "I'm telling you all these things now so you'll know every excuse I can give you for the fact I put together a card that nobody wanted to see."

In April of 1987, when Boesch made his decision to join forces with Titan Sports, a decision he quickly regretted, his office, upon airing of the television show which made the announcement, was deluged with mail from fans upset

because they weren't going to be seeing their favorite wrestlers (from the UWF) anymore. Boesch personally wrote individual hand-written letters to everyone, explaining that the UWF had been sold, that he had not been informed about the deal and why he had made the decision to start promoting WWF events. That in itself says more about his character as a promoter than anything else.

A few months later, myself, Jeff Bowdren, Mr. Mike and a few others went to Houston to see an NWA card, and he invited us to his office, the back of which may be the only real wrestling museum that I know of. He opened the office especially for us on a Saturday, so he could personally show us around, and stayed with us all day as we went through all the artifacts from the earlier decades.

I met with him a few more times after that, most recently at the 1988 Cauliflower Alley club meeting for old-time boxers and wrestlers in Southern California. He had invited me to come in for the annual reunion and introduced me to dozens of major wrestling stars whose names I only knew from reading about them in old books and magazines and told me great stories about all of them. I could tell it was very important to him to give me a greater knowledge and understanding of what wrestling was well before most of us were born and what it was that evolved into whatever it is today.

He called me again a few times early in 1989, since the Cauliflower Alley reunion would be taking place on March 11th, and wanted me to attend with him and his family once again. He had just gotten back from the presidential inauguration, and had just completed his book on the history of wrestling as well. He was very enthused in talking about the inauguration, since he had been friends with George Bush for many years, and Bush often attended Boesch's cards when he lived in Houston. He also asked me to make sure and read his book from the beginning to the end, and not just start with reading about the 60s when all the stories would have more familiarity.

The last time we talked was just a few days before his death. He called to make sure we'd be meeting over the weekend. He was about to make a deal to sell his entire wrestling collection. He asked me about certain passages in the book to make sure I really read the parts about the 30s. He complimented me on some of the recent issues and I actually believe he finally accepted that the Observer is good for the wrestling business the way it is being run today. In fact, he told me he couldn't wait for the new yearbook.

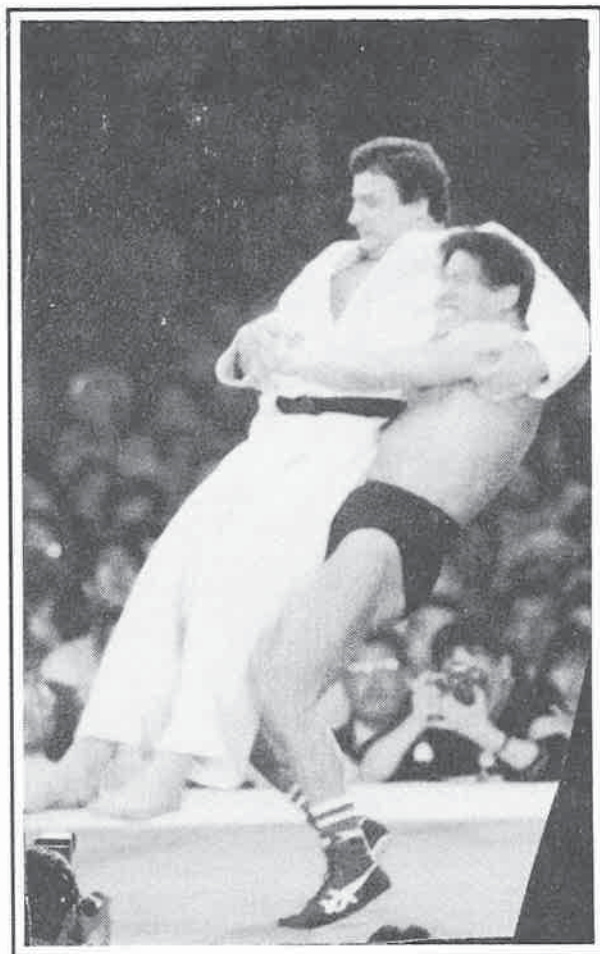
10. NEW JAPAN SETS GATE RECORD AT THE TOKYO DOME

After the signing of the Soviet wrestlers, New Japan was ready for the biggest debut party in pro wrestling history.

The Tokyo Egg Dome, a 56,000-seat baseball stadium, was booked to host its first pro wrestling event on April 24. With tickets priced from \$25 to \$240, this was expected to be a record setter.

Tickets sold fast originally, before the line-up was even announced. But the sales slowed down when the line-up came out. But the curiosity as to how the Soviets would do, plus the Japanese's fans fascination with the "shoot" got momentum back. Most fans had the idea that the Soviets wouldn't "do jobs" and with the language barrier tempers could flare and it would be something to see.

When the dust settled, a new record live gate was set—\$2,781,000—breaking the record set just three weeks earlier by Titan Sports when holding Wrestlemania V in Trump Plaza. The near capacity crowd of 53,800 was the third



Inoki vs Chochyashivili

largest paid crowd ever for a pro wrestling event, trailing the 90,817 at Wrestlemania III and 69,300 for a Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff match in Toronto in the summer of 1986.

The main event on the card saw Shota Chochyashivili, the 1972 Olympic gold medalist in judo, defeat Antonio Inoki by a fifth round knockout. The Russian groomed to be the biggest "wrestling" star of them all, Salman Hashimikov, popped the crowd with a quick pin of Bam Bam Bigelow using a version of the Northern Lights suplex. Another Russian, Wahka Eveloev, was put over legendary tough-man Masa Saito via submission. In addition, there was a tournament for the vacant IWGP World heavyweight title, won by Big Van Vader when he pinned Shinya Hashimoto in the finals. Lou Thesz refereed a tag team title match as Super Strong Machine & George Takano beat Shiro Koshinaka & Hiroshi Hase (long-time junior heavyweight rivals teaming together for their first title shot) in the best match on the card. Jushin Riger, the new "comic book" hero for the kids, made his debut with his new outfit and defeated Kuniaki Kobayashi in a slight disappointment of a match. One of the hottest matches of the show was the opener, when new sensation Naoki Sano won a month-long tournament by pinning Hiro Saito.

OTHER HEADLINES OF 1989

THE BALTIMORE BASH

Probably the best pay-per-view card, when it comes to the actual wrestling itself, was the NWA's Great American Bash: Glory Days card on July 23 in Baltimore.

The opening few matches weren't all-time classics or anything, but all were either well-wrestled or had good heat. The opening two-ring Battle Royal, won by the Skyscrapers, was good by today's Battle Royal standards. Brian Pillman

vs. Bill Irwin was a solid prelim match, Skyscrapers vs. Dynamic Dudes was a bad match, but had good crowd interest. Jim Cornette vs. Paul E. Dangerously in a Tuxedo street fight figured to be a terrible match, especially if you figured they were going six minutes and Cornette had blown out his knee the night before, but it turned out to be heated and not bad at all. The Steiners vs. Kevin Sullivan & Mike Rotunda was short, but wild, and then came the four matches which made the show the standard by which future PPV spectacles will be judged.

While the finish of the Sting vs. Great Muta match was criticized by some, nobody could criticize the high-flying fast-paced action. The Ricky Steamboat vs. Lex Luger match was borderline incredible and a match which got several votes for match of the year. The War Games that followed was nearly a half hour of wild action. And while the Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk match that headlined, complete with double juice and a 10-minute post-match brawl may not have been the best PPV match of the year, it still ranks as one of the ten best in the short history of the PPV/pro wrestling marriage.

The show was voted best major card of the year in the Observer year-end poll. The post card Observer scorecard gave the Bash a 96.8 percent positive response (which ironically trailed both the Music City Showdown in Nashville which got 100 percent and The New York Knockout show which got a 99.8 percent). An interesting trivia note to that card is that it was the only card of the year where Ric Flair, Terry Funk and Ricky Steamboat all wrestled. When Funk started wrestling, Flair was out of action, "recovering from his injuries." Even though Steamboat remained with the NWA for a week after this card, Flair didn't work again until August 5.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF DUSTY RHODES

It was an interesting year for pro wrestling's answer to the Goodyear blimp, Dusty Rhodes.

Rhodes, one of pro wrestling's biggest attractions for more than 15 years, had just been fired as NWA booker soon after the Ted Turner takeover. While he was offered the chance to stay with the NWA, his \$585,000 annual contract was to be cut back to an estimated \$250,000. But rather than be "one of the boys," Rhodes set things up for a return to his long-time Florida stomping grounds. While Rhodes, and most of the wrestling world, figured the return of Rhodes would revitalize the tiny Florida Championship Wrestling promotion, things didn't work out that way. Aside from one \$25,000 house for "The Homecoming" in Tampa, most shows drew in the 150 to 250 fan range per night. As it became obvious the venture was failing, Rhodes bailed out and in a minor surprise, wound up in the World Wrestling Federation.

While it was well-known as early as the latter stages of 1988 that Rhodes and WWF leader Vince McMahon were talking, the word around Titan is that they'd never actually take the guy. After all, a good deal of the top talent in the Titan stable was there specifically because they left the NWA because they no longer wanted to work for Rhodes.

Even more surprising was that not only did Rhodes get a big push with Titan, but got a huge reaction almost everywhere he appeared. While the initial attempt to get his over as a babyface who could headline cards failed, because Rhodes couldn't draw on top, he did fit in nicely second or third from the top with either Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, or Roddy Piper as the ones selling the tickets.

SUPER SUNDAY: WRESTLEMANIA VS. THE CLASH

For the second straight year, pro wrestling's biggest day of the year turned out to be a head-to-head confrontation between the two leading promotions in the United States.

In 1988, pro wrestling's first Super Sunday took place with the NWA presenting its first-ever Clash of the Champions special on TBS, while the WWF presented Wrestlemania IV on PPV and closed-circuit. The NWA accomplished everything it set out to do on that day. Looking back, the first Clash turned out to be a landmark event in pro wrestling.

The NWA set its own television viewing records that still stand. The 5.8 rating and 2,560,000 homes still remain all-time highs for the promotion. The main event, a 45 minute draw between Ric Flair and Sting, was viewed in a phenomenal 3,431,000 homes during its final 15 minutes, also still a record. And it was basically considered the best big wrestling card of the year.

Wrestlemania was not a financial flop, but its gross of \$16.6 million was something like \$9 million short of Titan's pre-card predictions. A solid percentage of the difference, estimated by cable companies as being one-quarter to one-half, was attributed to the NWA's free show. As a card, what turned out to be best known as "Wrestlemania Bore," may have been the most over-hyped card delivering the least pay-off of the recent rash of big shows.

The 1989 version of Super Sunday was originally not to be. But all sorts of back-room maneuverings took place early in the year. Titan Sports, with its Wrestlemania still entrenched as one of the leading PPV revenue events of the year and confident of breaking records with its Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage match-up, announced that it wanted the cable companies to guarantee monies equivalent to a seven percent buy rate (the previous WM did about a 6.5) or they wouldn't offer the companies the event. When word got out, Viacom Cable immediately contacted other companies to put a stop to this. The next move was a phone call directly to Ted Turner, who was asked to put on his own PPV event the same day as Wrestlemania, and all the leading companies would support the show. It appeared the WWF would be left with a few scattered cable companies, mainly in the smaller cities, and have to rely on closed-circuit (which bombed miserably the previous year for WM) for the bulk of its gate. In hindsight, even if Wrestlemania V would have done the business that III did on closed-circuit (which it in no way would have), the maneuver would have cost Titan Sports at least \$9 million.

Titan backed off on its demands. The cable companies backed off on their boycott. And the NWA was left holding the bag, having been asked to produce a PPV show, and then having the companies double-cross them on the date. The double-cross wound up with the cable companies giving the NWA an added PPV date, which turned out to be the Music City Showdown, a date not originally planned by the NWA to hold a PPV event.

So the NWA moved its card at the Superdome in New Orleans to TBS, for a free Clash special.

Financially, Wrestlemania V grossed approximately \$21 million between PPV, live gate and closed-circuit (and the 18,946 fans paying \$1,628,000 at Trump Plaza broke the live gate record set at Wrestlemania III and remains the U.S. record although as an all-time mark it was broken three weeks later in Japan) making it the biggest grossing pro

wrestling event of all-time. It was also voted worst big show of the year, by a resounding margin, in the Observer poll. While several matches were bad, the absent heat and an abhorrent skit involving Roddy Piper, Morton Downey Jr. and Brother Love made the show evoke comparisons with its predecessor.

The Clash, held in a nearly empty Superdome (5,300 fans in a 90,000-seat building), drew a somewhat disappointing 4.3 rating, mainly because booker George Scott (who was fired the day before the show) had completely failed to promote the card until the final weekend for fear that announcing a Flair vs. Steamboat match for television would have hurt the live gates for Flair vs. Steamboat matches which were being held almost nightly around the circuit.

With a new booking team of Jim Ross, Ric Flair, Eddie Gilbert and Kevin Sullivan pressed into last-minute action, the Clash turned into a very good television special. The headline match, a 55:32 match in which Ricky Steamboat beat Ric Flair to retain the NWA title with the double camera angle leg on the ropes finish was voted match of the year in the Observer poll, and will probably go down in wrestling history as one of the all-time classics.

The headline match of Wrestlemania saw Hulk Hogan regain the WWF title by pinning Randy Savage with a leg drop in 17:51. The match itself was good, but the ending was far too routine.

The post-card Observer readers poll gave the Clash a 97.4 percent positive rating and Wrestlemania a 17.4 percent positive rating. Judged head-to-head, 91.7 percent of the readers felt Clash was the better show, 7.1 percent felt Wrestlemania and 1.2 percent felt they were about the same. Flair vs. Steamboat was picked as the best match of the day by a whopping 96.5 percent of the readers.

The WWF ignored the existence of a competing event and claimed its typically exaggerated PPV figures and a ridiculous \$60 million gross. The NWA publicly proclaimed a victory, citing the far more positive fan reactions to its show. It also cited the fact that its show was viewed by approximately five million people as compared with approximately three million (between closed-circuit and PPV) for Wrestlemania.

RIC FLAIR BECOMES NWA BOOKER

If Ric Flair didn't have enough pressure in 1989, being in the position to be the franchise performer for the struggling NWA, he added even more pressure when he basically demanded to be made head booker shortly after the Baltimore PPV show.

Ric Flair, the booker, became an interesting and controversial addition to the Ric Flair legend. For someone who had been on top of his profession for so long, Flair had remarkably little heat with other wrestlers. He was universally respected, and virtually universally well-liked. The position of booker, however, makes it impossible to be universally well-liked. Others were concerned that the pressure of the booking position would be a detriment to the NWA's biggest asset at its house shows, the fact that the main event was almost always good, and often incredible, because of Flair's consistency.

Being the booker in the NWA is even harder. With so many voices around control center, there is constant second-guessing.

After five months as head booker, his work can be evaluated in a few ways.

1) PPV and Clash shows: Halloween Havoc was considered the weakest NWA PPV event of the year. However, its buy rate was the best of any NWA PPV event of the year. The Clash from Columbia, SC was generally considered a very good show, and garnered better TV ratings than any Clash to that point since the company changed hands. The Clash from Troy was an even better show and did even better ratings. Starrcade was not Flair's idea, and was not the best PPV show of the year, but given the hand that was dealt, it's hard to complain about the booking aspect of the card. The PPV numbers were weaker than they should have been, all things considered, but the prime reasons were probably the fact the card was being held on a Wednesday night with a too early starting time for most of the country; and that tournaments traditionally don't do well on PPV.

2) TV ratings: The TBS numbers on Saturday did a complete turn-around since Flair took over. Partially he benefitted because the show was on at its traditional time and not bumped around as it was during much of baseball season. At the same time, the TBS show had been consistently dropping in ratings dating back to 1984. The trend, which had been steady for five years downward, was reversed, which in TV, is an awfully hard thing to do. The Friday and Sunday TV ratings were up as well. However, the syndicated ratings and syndicated shows did not show improvement and still need a lot of work.

3) House shows: Not good. The quality of the house shows was not up to NWA standards. The crowds themselves were, for the most part, poor. The problem of no-shows, partially due to injuries and partially due to poor communication, was accentuated. While some of the causes of these problems are things that no booker can control, his performance here was hardly noteworthy.

The overwork factor of trying to do justice to two full-time jobs (as being booker and being "the best wrestler in the world" certainly are), and in reality three, since Flair is also legendary for his out-of-the-ring lifestyle, is incredible. The fact that Flair survived with minimal effect on his work rate over the short haul is a tribute to him as a wrestler. But given all the circumstances involved, and chronological age, if this continues, sooner or later it has to become more of a factor.

All eyes of the wrestling world will remain on Flair during 1990. Whatever course he takes, and the company takes, will be one of the most talked about stories for the next year and the early part of the next decade.

NWA DECRIES VIOLENCE

The most controversial time period of Ric Flair's five month booking reign was mid-September.

At the Clash of Champions in Columbia, SC, an angle was put on television, when during the main event of Flair & Sting vs. Dick Slater & Great Muta, Terry Funk came to ringside and put a plastic bag over Flair's head and tried to "suffocate" him.

Immediately a furor went up. TBS was flooded with phone calls about the angle. The newsletters were decrying the angle.

Less than two weeks later, in a TBS angle, as Scott Steiner was waiting on a street corner for his brother Rick, suddenly a limo with Robin Green (now Woman) showed up. The on TV mugging of Steiner received similar furor.

The results saw World Championship Wrestling Vice President publicly make a comment decrying the antics that his company had aired on both occasions. From that point forward, the NWA banned all blood on its television pro-

gram, and made it virtually impossible for similar angles to take place because they'd be either edited off television should they occur, or screened off before they were even taped.

There is not "right" or "wrong" on issues of this type, only shades of gray. How violent it too much. Depends on the taste of the viewer and what he wants pro wrestling to be. There comes a point where you can get so violent and bloody that you limit your audience to the same level as the USWA did in 1989. At the same time, if you don't overdo it, it does increase the intensity of the viewing audience and can lead to a rise in interest.

Viewed in hindsight, from a purely business standpoint, the angles weren't bad. TV ratings did increase. Whether the angles were a factor in this or not can be debated. But if they were that bad, the ratings and interest in the promotion would have declined. The next PPV, Halloween Havoc, did better business than the line-up indicated it would. While the plastic bag angle was decried as irresponsible because of children watching, there was not even one report of kids hurting each other by using a plastic bag because they were emulating Terry Funk and Ric Flair. At the same time, kids get hurt all the time emulating pro wrestling moves like jumping off furniture with splashes and pile driving each other.

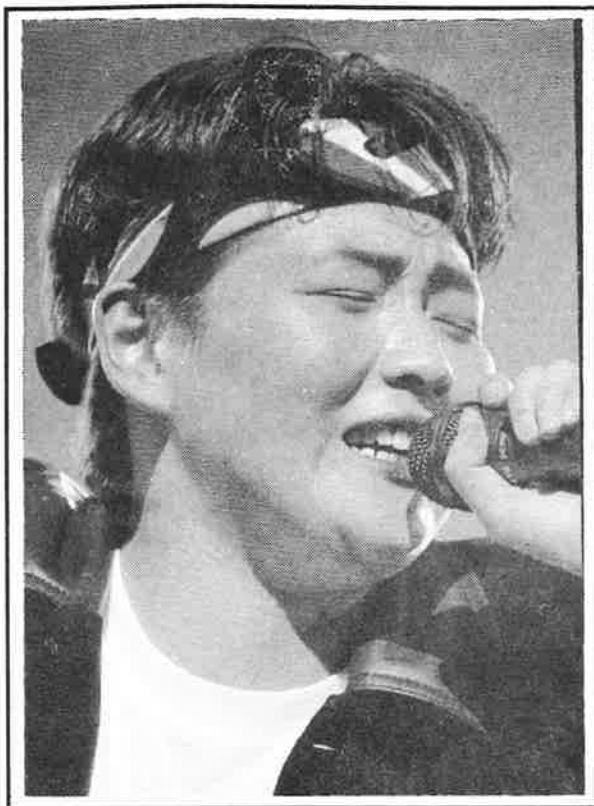
But there is another side to all this. It's a side a lot of hardcore wrestling fans don't see. It's simply the mores of today's society. If you ask anyone who isn't a wrestling fan whether or not it is sickening for grown men to cut their foreheads with razor blades to produce blood, you know what answer you will get. As a fan, I can rationalize it by saying it's no more sickening than knee crunching in pro football or as truly devastating as taking a crazy bump, but to the public it has another connotation. The NWA is a wrestling promotion run by a television broadcasting empire. There are standards that apply to all television programming, and the NWA has to abide by those standards, even if in some small way they interfere with certain aspects of pro wrestling that have been around for a long time. That is the reality of pro wrestling in the future, and in the long run, will most likely apply to all pro wrestling on television.

PROMOTIONS FOLD UP

The long-time trend in the decline in the number of regional wrestling offices continued this year.

As the year came to a close, three major offices closed their doors—Continental based in Alabama; CWA based in Tennessee (which merged with the Dallas-based USWA, formerly World Class) and Stampede in Western Canada.

While there is a chance that Continental and Stampede may be revived in some form in 1990, the odds of them being able to be financially successful upon revival are not good. The crystal ball for the 90s is not very bright for regional pro wrestling.



Chigusa Nagayo

RODDY PIPER RETURNS

Roddy Piper, probably second only to Hulk Hogan in influence from a wrestlers' standpoint during pro wrestling's media boom in 1985, returned to the ring after a two-year-retirement over the summer.

Piper's first few matches came out of the blue, as has was a last-minute sub for Jake Roberts for a series of matches in California. At that point it was pretty much known that Piper would return to the ring. The only question was when, how regularly he was willing to work, and perhaps who he was going to work for.

Piper did negotiate with the NWA, but most believe that was merely to up his price to Titan. He also did a lot of behind-the-scenes work for Don Owen's promotion in Oregon. But by the fall, Piper was working full-time for the WWF, as a babyface and working a major program with Rick Rude. Initially

Piper drew very well upon his return, but just so-so afterwards. It was clear he was Titan's No. 3 babyface draw, behind Hogan and the Anabolic Warrior, and also clear that due to injuries, his ring work, never his strong point, was mediocre at best.

Piper's return for the short haul led to a big increase in the ratings of Prime Time Wrestling, which he had a short run as co-host of. The ratings steadily crept back to normal levels after the initial impact, and by the end of the year, Piper was off the show, partially by his own decision because he was tired of working so much.

JIM HERD TAKES OVER NWA

With Jim Crockett Jr. and Dusty Rhodes phased out of the picture with the Ted Turner purchase of the NWA, the man in charge, Jack Petrik, hired Jim Herd to handle the company.

Herd's background included an executive stint with Pizza Hut, KPLR-TV in St. Louis and with the St. Louis Blues hockey team. He had some wrestling background in that he had a stint in the 60s as part of the production crew for Vince McMahon Sr. wrestling TV show when it was based in Washington, D.C., and had a several year stint as the director for Sam Muchnick's television show in St. Louis during the early 70s.

Herd was torn between a number of factions coming in. There was the Crockett faction, which wanted everything kept status quo, including Dusty Rhodes retained as booker. Most outsiders felt that would have been suicide for the company, since it was the same group which basically committed the financial suicide which led to the Turner takeover. There was the faction which wanted to go back to old-time wrestling. There was the faction that wanted to copy Vince McMahon.

The first year of the Herd regime was one of many changes

in direction. There were five bookers in less than one year—starting with Rhodes, who had booked the company almost into bankruptcy. Crockett followed and during his short stint, things steadied, but it was obvious Crockett wasn't a long-term booker. To neutralize Crockett in the company, Jim Barnett suggested hiring George Scott, a man Crockett hated, to Herd. Scott was hired, and then fired when his stint turned out to be a complete disaster. Then came the booking committee of Ric Flair, Kevin Sullivan, Jim Ross and Eddie Gilbert. The quartet produced good television and livened things up, but were constantly at odds with each other and the company was going in too many different directions. Then came the current regime with Flair, which has had its pluses and minuses.

It's difficult to evaluate Herd's first year. Whether it was his doing or not, he was the overseer and he therefore gets the credit and blame for how the company is doing, but the group did turn out some of the best big shows ever. It did produce some of the finest actual wrestling matches of the decade. The steadily falling TV ratings, which hit all-time lows in the summer, made an impressive fall rebound.

At the same time, the group never seemed to go in a steady direction. The early emphasis was on the wrestling product, which undeniably improved. But when it didn't turn around the gates, the gimmickry started. But the gimmickry went in so many directions that little of its effects were positive. Certainly the idea of the Ding Dongs, which Herd may never live down, was a disaster. Other Herd ideas, such as a Hunchback tag team (which of course could never get pinned because of round shoulders) or the wrestler who comes in looking like a candy stripe, or turning Sting into "The Wall Street Warrior," would have been even worse had they not been nipped in the bud. Internally, the failure to re-sign Ricky Steamboat (which negated whatever box office power Lex Luger had for the next few months), sent a bad message to the boys. Steamboat was a team player in that in the ring he always did what was best for the company, and not necessarily for his own career. His ring work was so good that many actually compared him favorably to Flair. But the wrestlers saw the failure to re-sign Steamboat, and at the same time the continued push of certain wrestlers who didn't put the company's interests ahead of their own, as a sign that the company's policy about clean finishes and good work being a priority was more smoke than fire. More importantly, it once again gave many wrestlers the "I'd better take care of myself" attitude, because the guy who gave it all for the company's benefit wasn't taken care of by the company for all his hard work.

Still, as the year comes to a close, because of increased television ad revenue, establishment of the Clash specials and PPV's as "big" events and just because of the apparent commitment of the Turner organization such as constructing a new television studio which will be in evidence early next year, the NWA appears to be in this game for the long haul.

BLANCHARD & ANDERSON QUIT WWF

Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson, who gained their national fame as being members of the "Four Horseman" with Ric Flair and various fourth members (Ole Anderson, Lex Luger and Barry Windham) in the NWA, quit the group in September, 1988 after a dispute with Dusty Rhodes.

A year later, as the wrestling world turned, Rhodes was in the WWF again. Ric Flair was the NWA's booker and wanting to make a few key WWF raids to prove that the NWA was an equal competitor in fans' eyes. While TBS management didn't want to do any raiding, since a war would escalate salaries on both sides, something not in the best interest of TBS and Titan when it comes to the eventual bottom line, they finally consented in this case. What made

the raid even bigger was that Blanchard & Anderson were the WWF's tag team champions. But Blanchard & Anderson agreed to work through Thanksgiving, to avoid legal action for breach of their two-year contract. This gave McMahon plenty of time to bury the duo, which he took full advantage of. In hindsight, it would have been in the NWA's best interest to announce the return of the two before they had lost the WWF titles, because anything that happened to them in the WWF from that point forward would have been useless. However, even though everyone in wrestling knew, it was supposed to be a secret. The NWA kept officially saying that Blanchard & Anderson weren't coming in. Blanchard & Anderson kept saying they were leaving to go to Japan. It was a humorous situation where everyone knew the truth, but everyone was still trying to work everyone else.

But the ultimate work was yet to come. Blanchard failed a Titan drug test three weeks before his departure date, and was fired.

By this time, several people in the NWA were second-guessing the idea of bringing the two in. They were no longer tag champs. They did a few jobs on television. And everyone knew that they were going to be "fired" by Bobby Heenan on Saturday Night's Main Event, making it look like they crawled back after losing their jobs, rather than quit a promotion on top which was the actual case. Suddenly the NWA decided not to bring in Blanchard, stating a possible public relations problem stemming from hiring a wrestler fired by the competition for failing a drug test.

Anderson came in right after Thanksgiving and was immediately pushed to the top of the NWA shows.

SAVAGE GOES HEEL

The biggest actual "turn" of the year involved Randy Savage. Savage was one of the WWF's top heels for two years, before a face turn which culminated in him winning the WWF title at Wrestlemania IV.

For the next year, seeds were slowly planted for an eventual showdown with Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania. The plan was slow and steady. A little thing happened here. A little thing happened there. Mainly hinting glances more than anything else.

The turn itself took place on the WWF's annual NBC special in February. During a tag match with Hogan & Savage as partners against Akeem & Big Bossman, Elizabeth was "injured" taking an incredible bump from her flying husband. A "doctor's office" backstage scene with the WWF's big three, culminated the turn. With Savage breaking away from Elizabeth, in reality his wife of four years, and going heel leading to Wrestlemania.

Savage saved what was one of the worst-acted skits by a major promotion in years. Elizabeth had a hard time keeping a straight face, and Hogan was even worse, even once asking for a countdown when he thought they were off the air.

For the next two months, Randy Savage was pro wrestling in the United States. While his work was its usual inconsistent level (he can be as good as anyone in the business when he's on, but when he's not, he can be as bad as all but the guys who have no business being called wrestlers), his interviews were incredible. Combined with the usual state-of-the-art Titan Sports hype, the Hogan-Savage confrontation made Wrestlemania V the biggest grossing pro wrestling event ever.

Savage lost the title to Hogan, with a clean pinfall. He immediately got Sherri Martel as his new manager, to do a women's feud with Elizabeth that never came off as well as

it sounded going in. Savage drew big gates throughout the summer and early fall with Hogan, although skeptics claim, and probably true, that the gates would have been substantially larger had they done any finish but the one they did at Wrestlemania.

After that ended, Savage was in a forgettable feud with Jim Duggan, which is where he stands as the year comes to a close.

CHIGUSA NAGAYO RETIRES

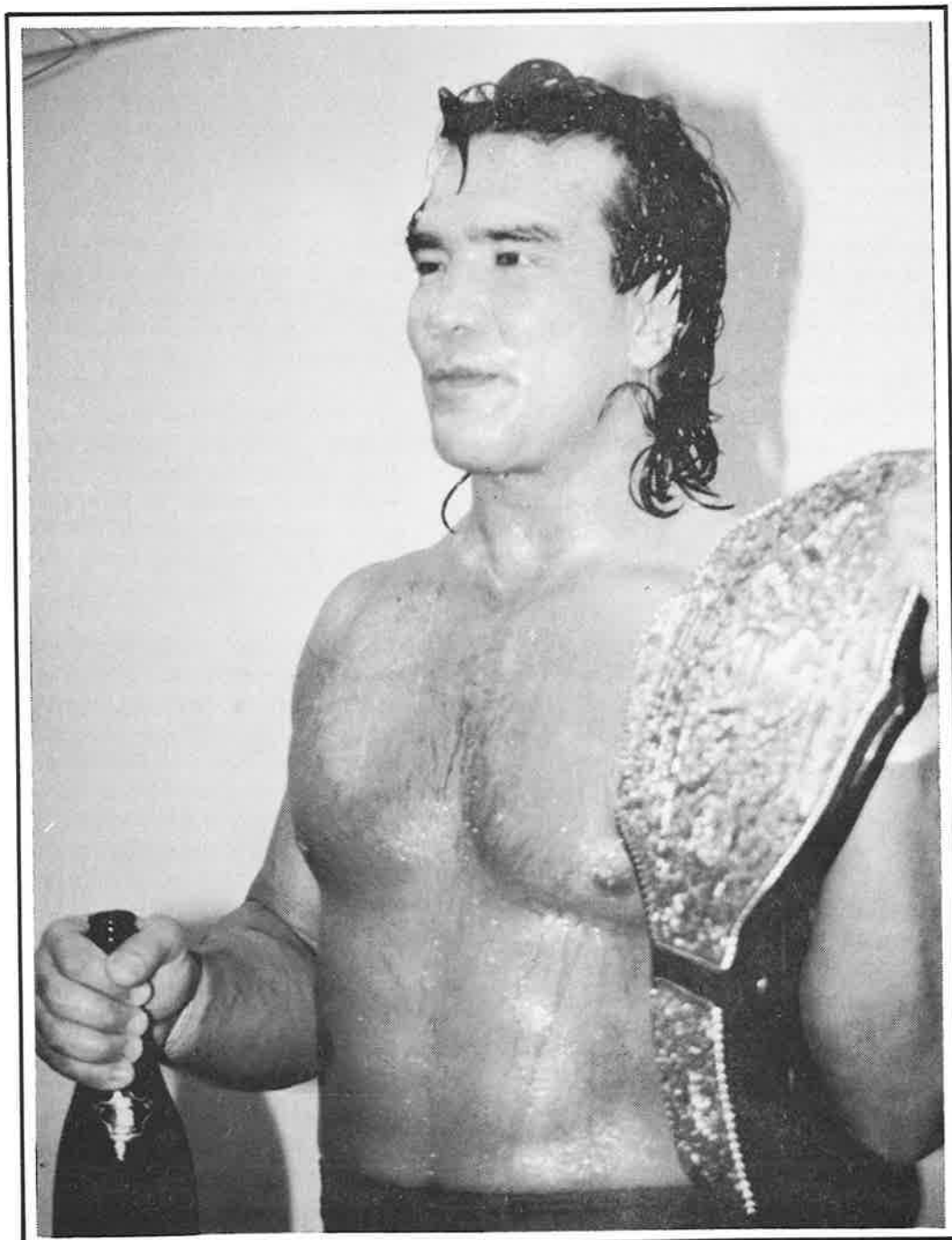
During the middle part of the decade, women's wrestling in Japan reached new heights of popularity.

Not only were the women's promotions packing houses, but they were the catalyst for dozens and dozens of fan clubs, incredible merchandising revenue and even a few top-10 records.

The main beneficiary of all this was Chigusa Nagayo, a 25-year-old who was the top babyface during the boom, and becomes of it, easily the most popular and biggest drawing card of any female wrestler in history.

With the promotion losing popularity after Dump Matsumoto's retirement in 1988, and with more and more interest in Nagayo as both a concert performer and an actress, early in the year her retirement card was booked for May 6 in Yokohama.

While the \$521,000 house set a new record for women's pro wrestling, and the crowd of 12,500 was the third largest ever, it also spelled the end of an era. The end of the glory days of Japanese women's pro wrestling. While the women's group is still around, it now promotes shows in front of a few hundred fans per night, rather than the thousands who attended nightly during the glory days. Its own magazine folded. The Fan Clubs started disappearing. The younger girls didn't have the charisma to maintain the popularity or fill the shoes of the retired veterans. While Nagayo was not the only reason, and maybe Matsumoto was every bit as important (since the real decline in television ratings can be traced to Matsumoto's retirement), her retirement ceremony was the last day of glory. Indeed, for an era in Japan, it was the day the music died.



1989 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS

CATEGORY A -- WINNERS JUDGED ON TOTAL POINTS, FIVE POINTS FOR EACH FIRST PLACE VOTE, THREE POINTS FOR EACH SECOND PLACE VOTE AND TWO POINTS FOR EACH THIRD PLACE VOTE

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. RIC FLAIR (351) | 2,254 |
| 2. Akira Maeda (141) | 1,561 |
| 3. Terry Funk (112) | 1,110 |
| 4. Genichiro Tenryu (22) | 509 |
| 5. Ricky Steamboat (14) | 422 |

Honorable Mention: Randy Savage 197, Jushin Riger 183, Hulk Hogan 161, Lex Luger 120

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Harley Race
1981 - Ric Flair
1982 - Ric Flair
1983 - Ric Flair
1984 - Ric Flair
1985 - Ric Flair
1986 - Ric Flair
1987 - Riki Choshu
1988 - Akira Maeda

RICH KERIN: There can be no doubt that the best wrestler in the United States this past year was Ric Flair. His series of matches with Steamboat and Funk made wrestling more exciting to watch, not only to die hard fans but to casual fans as well. Flair has been great to watch in the past, but this year he showed just how phenomenal his ability and work rate really is. Whether it was in scientific matches with Muta, brawls with Funk or a combination of both with Steamboat, he proved this year that he's the best of this and any other era.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Terry Funk scared the crap out of me when I went to him for an autograph when I was in the seventh grade and he scared me again in the "I Quit" match. It's so rare to see a guy give all he has, and then still give more. Funk earns the highest praise you can get in this business, forcing Ric Flair into second place for Wrestler of the year.

ROBERT SILBER: While it's not news that Ric Flair is the consummate wrestler of the 80s, he's never had so many quality challengers as he's had this year. His matches against Luger, Steamboat and Funk were some of the best of his career. Like fine wine, he seems to have improved with age.

JEFF MULLINS: I see it as a toss-up between Flair, Hogan and Maeda. Maeda because of the success of the UWF. Flair because he's in such a lousy situation and yet has taken risks, sacrificed himself, made some enemies, shaken things up which is all the more admirable when you take into account he's working under the gun of a management and ownership which have little real experience in wrestling. Yet the NWA is slowly going in the right direction. Hogan because he's the franchise. The meal ticket. The monster who cut the mold in his own likeness and is simply irreplaceable as the No. 1 box office draw in the United States. You can't deny what the UWF has accomplished without television. Yet the fact the NWA simply survived with the future looking brighter is a testimony to one man, Ric Flair, who got them through the toughest of times. And the success of the WWF, which is a house that Hogan built, stands as Hogan's badge of honor.

ANTHONY AMARA: Even though Ricky Steamboat worked only half a year and his ultra-babyface family unit gimmick failed at the box office and he was booed by the fans he affected pro wrestling greatly during a crucial period. Ted Turner had just purchased the NWA and Dusty Rhodes and the Crockett family were about to become history. The WWF's national monopoly of wrestling in the public's eyes was challenged. Steamboat brought out the best in Ric Flair and put credibility back to the NWA title during the greatest series of championship matches this country has witnessed in recent memory. Steamboat also had a brief but brilliant feud that revealed Lex Luger as a drastically improved performer with a legitimate shot at becoming one of the business' better workers sometime down the road. If the NWA does have a healthy future one would have to look back at Steamboat's stint with the NWA during the first half of 1989 as the initial shot in the arm for Ted Turner's new company.

BRIAN TRAMEL: I've been told that Terry Funk came back this year to prove that he was still one of the best. Well, he was the best. He has nothing else to prove to either the fans or the promoters.

SMM: Akira Maeda should win this but my pick is Terry Funk. Funk came along at a time when the NWA was just about rock bottom. After feuding Flair with Sting, Luger and Steamboat, and the disastrous stint with George Scott as booker, the NWA was on the ropes and had nothing to go to. Along with Flair, Funk succeeded in giving the NWA its best feud at the gate and in terms of heat in quite a while. They brought TV ratings back up from disastrous numbers early in the year. Funk did this despite having to deal with a broken back, a staph infection in his elbow, battered knees and a killer schedule.

JEFF BOWDREN: Ric Flair is the Wrestler of the year, Wrestler of the decade and wrestler of our lifetime. I give Maeda second. He probably should be No. 1 based on impact, but I hold the fact he only wrestles once a month against him. Hogan gets third. You can't deny he's the flagship of the Titan organization. When the general public thinks of pro wrestling, they think of Hulk Hogan.

MARK MADDEN: Funk's comeback was the equivalent of Julius Erving returning to the NBA and scoring 35 points per game or Terry Bradshaw coming out of retirement to win another Super Bowl. Funk's feud with Flair was the best in wrestling and drew the NWA biggest houses. Flair and Maeda had tons of impact on the business to be sure but they did it by keeping their momentum built up over a long period of time. Funk started from scratch and overnight became the top heel in the business and one of its most entertaining workers.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: Flair and Maeda were easily the top two choices, but picking Steamboat over Funk was very tough for third. Sentimentally, one would pick Funk, but thinking back to the unbelievable series of matches between Flair and Steamboat, I went with Steamboat. Funk reinforced his immediate entrance into Wrestling's Hall of Fame, but Steamboat was the best wrestler in the world for a period of time this year.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Jushin Riger was the most exciting wrestler this year. He finally got the chance he's deserved

for so long. Terry Funk was incredible. He helped keep the NWA's head above water when it faced drowning.

ALEX MARVEZ: Is there anything Ric Flair didn't do this year? He was lead heel, lead babyface and booker. He became the NWA. At least seven match of the year candidates involved him. Unbelievably, he is still having to fight for the top spot in the promotion. If he can keep his spot, it should be the story of 1990. I'd pick Maeda second based on drawing power, but he only wrestled about a dozen times this year and I don't consider the UWF as wrestling.

TONY DUNCAN: I've followed wrestling since the age of five. I've seen Ric Flair since his first television appearance in the Mid-Atlantic area and I can't ever remember anyone performing at the level that he reached this past year.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: No competition for first place. The only other guys I could even consider were Terry Funk and Rick Steamboat. How can you improve on near perfection in the business. Flair is the consummate wrestler, the best in mat work, interviews and overall charisma. Although he may be replaced as champion next year, he will always remain the greatest wrestler of this and any other era.

TERESA DEMARIE: Maeda is the only one who has combined impact with ring work this year. Picked Funk second. How can you not appreciate a guy who bounces around basically bereft of healthy joints at the not-so-tender age of 45? Funk was very credible as top heel despite being a 70s style wrestler with little physical appearance credibility.

TED KUMLANDER: Flair deserves every bit of praise he gets and more. He's always fresh and his moves always look crisp and his timing is always superb. He sells better than anyone and his matches look the most convincing. He gets better every year. It will be hard to fill his shoes because the next champion will always be compared with him.

BOB CLOSSON: His booking ability may be knocked but this year more than any other proved that Ric Flair is the best of this era. So many times he was involved in classic matches. He may have had more great matches this year than most great wrestlers have in a lifetime. You can see he makes everyone he wrestles look that much better.

TRENT WALTERS: I want to vote for Akira Maeda because he took the UWF from nothing to what it is. But I think it's the style that draws the crowds, not Maeda. So I'm putting Maeda second with Hulk Hogan first because nothing in North America drew consistently except when Hogan was on the card. Third goes to Flair. He had more great matches by himself this year than any other promotion had combined.

SCOTT HUDSON: Ric Flair had his beat year ever both in and out of the ring. He has won this award several times in years when he wasn't as good as he was in 1989.

STEVE SIMS: I picked Tenryu first because more than anyone else, his work kept All Japan successful while fighting off strong challenges from New Japan and the UWF.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Flair's feud with Steamboat gave us the best series of matches since Satoru Sayama vs. Dynamite Kid. That would have been enough, but he pulled out all the stops in a physically grueling series against Terry Funk. And if that wasn't enough, he took over as booker as well. While you can fault some of his executive decision making, you surely must praise his in-ring excellence.

PAUL HANLIN: Ric Flair's work ethic was great in 1989, but the reason Maeda deserves this again is that he fulfills the requirements of the category better than anyone else.

The utter failure of the NWA to gain any ground with Flair calling the shots, compared with the electrifying success that the UWF continues to have answers all questions about the impact on the business that each man has had. Ability-wise, I give Flair the edge, but drawing power, influence and value to the promotion, it's no contest. Not after the Tokyo Dome show.

MIKE OMANSKY: Savage started and ended the year as a central figure in the biggest promotion. His work rate is almost always there. He's a strong interview, drew huge gates and is a great wrestler. Flair is also great and may be the NWA's biggest draw, but the poor house show attendance throughout the year knocks him to second place.

STEVE YOHE: Flair had the best year of his great career but I think it'll be the last time he wins this award.

STEVE GENNARELLI: A much deserved vote for Terry Funk. He was the best heel, best brawler and best interview of the year. Terry provided color in a year when can best be described as drab. Second goes to Flair for all the reasons annually mentioned.

MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. RIC FLAIR (356) | 2,146 |
| 2. Jushin Riger (107) | 1,368 |
| 3. Ricky Steamboat (54) | 988 |
| 4. Terry Funk (82) | 826 |
| 5. Genichiro Tenryu (11) | 289 |

Honorable Mention: Great Muta 114, Nobuhiko Takada 108, Naoki Sano 87

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1986 - Ric Flair
1987 - Ric Flair
1988 - Tatsumi Fujinami

RICH KERIN: The best matches of the year in the United States all involved the same man, Ric Flair. Night-after-night Flair gave his all. His spectacular matches during the many Clashes and PPV shows proved he was always able to meet up to the challenge that a big show necessitates.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Flair is the ultimate in wrestling. He has been pushed and pulled in many different directions and has probably performed more consistently on a nightly basis than anyone has in years. He has no peers. Steamboat gets second. He had the greatest series of matches probably of all-time and followed it up with an excellent series against Lex Luger. Funk was invaluable to the promotion. He was in tremendous condition and got to the top through sheer determination.

STEVE YOHE: Flair and Steamboat get first and second. The matches between the two were the highlight of the year. While other wrestlers have more spectacular moves, these two are able to create authentic athletic contests that don't insult or demean the intelligence of anyone who watches. They made me proud to be a wrestling fan.

TERESA DEMARIE: Steamboat put together some of the best matches I've ever seen, and it wasn't just because he was working with Flair.

JOHN MCADAM: Flair wrestled hundreds of matches in 1989 and there was no such thing as a bad Flair match.

LAZARUS DOBELSKY: Flair by a large margin. I can't remember any year where one wrestler has been involved in so many great and completely different matches with

different opponents, from a 55-minute match with Steamboat to a 10-minute scientific match with Armstrong to wild brawls with Funk to Japanese-style matches with Muta.

MARK MADDEN: There has never been a better in-ring performer than Flair and he had his best year ever. The three best matches of 1989 all had Flair in them, which makes it even sadder to think that 1990 may be the year the NWA removes him from the top. Flair's work in the Steamboat and Funk feuds was breathtaking, combining ring psychology with a level of athletic skill performers in other sports would kill for. Forget about Flair being the most outstanding wrestler of this past year, it's time to call him the most outstanding wrestler of all-time.

JOE LANCELLO: The Flair-Steamboat matches from Chicago and New Orleans will be talked about as the best matches of all-time. For a series of matches to be so far above the rest, it takes two to tango.

ROBERT SILBER: Ricky Steamboat has the ability to make other excellent wrestlers, including Flair, reach a level they can't reach with anyone else. Flair may be the best wrestler of the decade, but nobody has been able to bring out as much in him as Steamboat. He was also a major factor in Luger becoming a solid main eventer from a working standpoint. I saw Steamboat at several local shows before small houses and he put out just as he did at the PPV shows. He was both the hardest worker and most unappreciated performer in 1989.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Anyone who can "wrestle" Junkyard Dog and make three-quarters of the crowd think that the fat, old blown-up Dog had him almost beaten and running for his life (and the Dog only took about ten steps the entire match) like Ric Flair did deserves this award hands down.

LARRY LOVELL: Flair is my top pick because at the age of 39, he's still at his peak. His matches with Steamboat and Funk were classic additions to the Flair wrestling legacy. Steamboat is my second choice for his work with Flair. It was like turning the clock back a decade or so in the old Mid Atlantic territory. Genichiro Tenryu had a standout year and he's my pick for third.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Although Funk and Flair were outstanding this year, I believe Riger deserves this award. When he steps into the ring, you expect a four-star match no matter who his opponent is and you get it.

STEVE SIMS: Steamboat's wrestling was at the highest level for the six months he was in. Riger was the best of the flying wrestlers and Tenryu was the most realistic in brutal matches. His match with Tsuruta made me believe.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Jushin Riger does things that take your breath away. His flip off the top rope onto a prone Naoki Sano on the arena floor was beyond belief. He had many other moves that were almost as spectacular. For the first time in five years I don't wistfully speculate if Satoru Sayama will return to the ring. We now have Jushin Riger and that's more than enough for me. Flair is probably the greatest wrestler of all-time and 1989 was one of his best years. Did any wrestler have so many four and five stars matches night-after-night? It is only Riger's spectacular moves that denies Flair the top spot. Third goes to Sano. In just a few months he went from a nameless prelim wrestler to World jr. heavyweight champ. This meteoric climb was a result of a lot of ability and an attitude which said, "I will do anything to get over."

PAUL HANLIN: A lot of people will vote for Flair. I would, too, except no active wrestler made the most of his ability and push as Terry Funk. Before the New York

Knockout match I'd have only had him fifth, but after the match, he has to get the award.

BEST BABY FACE

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. | HULK HOGAN (385) | 2,244 |
| 2. | Ultimate Warrior (44) | 949 |
| 3. | Akira Maeda (95) | 853 |
| 4. | Ric Flair (30) | 684 |
| 5. | Sting (25) | 576 |

Honorable Mention: Rick Steiner 147, Roddy Piper 105

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Dusty Rhodes
1981 - Tommy Rich
1982 - Hulk Hogan
1983 - Hulk Hogan
1984 - Hulk Hogan
1985 - Hulk Hogan
1986 - Hulk Hogan
1987 - Hulk Hogan
1988 - Hulk Hogan

CHRIS ZAVISA: While I hate to give anything positive to the Hulkster, the retirement of Chigusa Nagayo clinches this award for him. Despite a poor work rate and an overall attitude of disdain for the rest of the profession, you can't deny the box office popularity of the guy. If you were a promoter drafting wrestlers the way they do college athletes, would there be any doubt as to who would be your first pick? For years we've been awaiting the Flair turn and we finally got it. It was masterfully done and Flair more than held up his end. I just hope he isn't turned back soon in the hunt for a quick fix. While the NWA may still favor putting a heel in the title spot, McMahon and Hogan have changed the game. Flair should be the champ we all love, not the champ we love to hate.

BOB CLOSSON: It's hard to say that one person is responsible for the huge success of the UWF, but Maeda's the start and its key name and they sold 40,000 tickets in one day.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: You can say what you won't about his ability but he does draw. Heat and money. Five years since the boom and Hulk Hogan is still undoubtedly the biggest attraction in wrestling. You can't dispute the box office.

ANDY STOWELL: I don't think any woman wrestler will ever reach the popularity of Chigusa Nagayo. Hogan's bully-as-hero role made me sick and I think he's lost a lot in the last year.

ALEX MARVEZ: Why does everyone knock Eric Embry? He successfully got himself over without any impressive physical tools. He rejuvenated World Class at the gate.

JOHN JANCE: Hogan still hasn't lost his touch. His appeal to the kids remains strong. His identification with the sport was indelibly noted by a recent TV Guide cover. His first (and hopefully last) starring motion picture grossed better than expected and he continues to draw better than anyone else in the business.

MARK MADDEN: I don't like Hogan, but he gets the true response of blind adoration you look for in your top baby-face. He can't wrestle. His interviews are cliched. He looks older every day, but the fans love him.

RICH KERIN: Hogan remains the No. 1 box office draw. His popularity continues even though it isn't at the level it was a few years ago. Every time he comes down the aisle he's met with the loudest pop of any wrestler.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Hogan stands out above the competition. The movie effectively strengthened his position as a mainstream celebrity.

BEST HEEL

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| 1. TERRY FUNK (351) | 2,340 |
| 2. Randy Savage (97) | 1,249 |
| 3. Lex Luger (72) | 1,062 |
| 4. Rick Rude (21) | 575 |
| 5. Ted DiBiase (9) | 125 |

Honorable Mention: Zeus 91

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 - Larry Zbyszko
1981 - Don Muraco
1982 - Buzz Sawyer
1983 - Michael Hayes
1984 - Roddy Piper
1985 - Roddy Piper
1986 - Michael Hayes
1987 - Ted DiBiase
1988 - Ted DiBiase

PAUL HANLIN: Funk's work in the ring and on interviews exceeded being human at times. Second is Luger and I think he'll win this next year.

CHRIS ZAVISA: With 20 years of experience behind him, Funk should be the best. The real shock was his ability was at the same level as it was 10 or 15 years ago. When he enters the arena, people truly hate him. Savage went from face to heel without skipping a beat. His Wrestlemania interviews were the best in years at Titan, but nowhere near the level of his interviews in Memphis years ago.

STEVE SIMS: Savage drew the biggest house show gates of the year. By the end of the year, Sherri Martel was the lead heel and the hardest worker in the WWF. Funk was excellent in the NWA and in Florida, but compared to the Titan wrestlers, he drew very little.

JOHN JANCE: Luger seems to have developed quite a bit of confidence this year. His interviews have been improving weekly. Watching his arrogance when he does squash matches is often surprising. He delivered the line of the year when, after destroying Steamboat at the Clash, he said, "So much for your No. 1 contender." In this age of cartoon wrestlers, he is one who can actually wrestle. He's shown improvement the past two years. As such, when he holds the NWA title, he will be an imposing alternative to Hogan and Warrior. The only disappointment in Funk was his inability to appear to have a chance of actually beating Flair. That's why Luger should be placed above him. Remember the Funk-Steamboat match? As it ended, Luger came into the ring and stared at Funk and Funk fled the ring. In that instant, Funk lost whatever edge he needed in order to appear to be a legitimate title threat

ROBERT SILBER: Funk is not only an outstanding wrestler but a master of crowds. I was at shows where Lex Luger and Michael Hayes couldn't generate heat to save their lives, and Funk was able to generate tons of genuine hatred. His performance at Wrestle War going from a celebrity judge to the most hated man in the sport was an all-time classic.

JON KARESH: Funk's interviews were first rate and he played the classic wrestling villain. He would have been even better had some wrestlers been more willing to do jobs for him so he could have been looked at as a more serious

challenge to Flair. It was a prime example of how certain wrestlers' egos get in the way of the good of the promotion.

SCOTT HUDSON: Savage is an awesome heel. Sherri added to his effectiveness. Zeus did get over good as a monster heel, even though he was a joke in the ring. I enjoyed almost everything these three did this past year except when Zeus wrestled. Funk's heel work in the NWA and Florida, while totally different from Savage and Zeus, was equally impressive.

TODD STUTTS: Nobody deserves this except for Funk. Once he came back, nobody was even close. If he hadn't have come back, Savage would get it.

JEFF BOWDREN: Funk was awesome. I hope he proved to Giant Baba that he wasn't washed up. Savage gets second. His interviews leading up to Wrestlemania were some of the best interviews ever.

STEVE SCHONBERGER: Savage deserves the award just for those great pre-Wrestlemania interviews.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Who was the guy that had the best heel persona? Who was the guy who tried to kill Ric Flair with a plastic bag? Who made the gates go up in the NWA? The answer is Funk, who many said was "too old," and he then became the best heel in the business.

LAZARUS DOBELSKY: Rude is so sleazy that you even want the jobbers to cream him.

JOHN MCADAM: Funk was incredible this year. To get over the way he did with a non-bodybuilder physique and at his age is an outstanding accomplishment. Savage gets second for the interviews about the "lust in Hogan's eyes" and "the little pukesters."

TERESA DEMARIE: Savage is the class of the current lot. When he wants to be, he's a great worker, and that helps him get over, but he doesn't want to be all that often. He needs his female second to help him get heat and should be able to do it on his own. Being a 70s style wrestler and not having the physique has made Funk have to work harder at being a great heel, despite his push. He's not particularly flashy but his work is far stronger and more consistent than Savage. Some of his interviews are excellent and he works the crowd live much better. Rude has no problems getting arrogance and conceit across. When working with Piper, he got heel heat second-to-none. Gets a great deal of mileage out of his looks and build and is one of the few truly handsome men in wrestling. Not a great interview, but his reading cue cards badly is also easy to hate.

MIKE WOOD: For five minutes in Nashville, Funk was the greatest heel I've ever seen.

ANDY STOWELL: If you told me last year that a retired wrestler could generate this kind of hate from the fans without working in the WWF or being a monster, I'd have never believed it. If he hadn't retired, I think the Flair vs. Funk feud could outlast the Tsuruta vs. Tenryu feud that's gone on for two years.

ALEX MARVEZ: Funk was great in the NWA but his best work was in Florida when he hooked Dusty Rhodes to the back of a pick-up truck and tried to drive off with him. I'd vote for Savage first, except he got boring by the end of the year, but "Macho King" should win an award for the best nickname. Luger was great, but was often matched up with foes who weren't of his calibre. He may win this next year.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: I chose Luger over Funk because Luger draws tremendous heat even when he doesn't do

anything. He plays the perfect arrogant heel. Funk lost a lot because he was pushed for too long but you can't forget those interviews. Only Jerry Lawler can do a better heel interview.

RICH KERIN: Funk gets it without a doubt. From his memorable pile driver on Ric Flair at the Music City Show—down to all his great interviews to his electrifying "I Quit" match, Funk brought new meaning to the word heel. He should have been in the Hall of Fame already but he saved his best work for last.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Only Funk could make Gary Hart look like a good manager. Rude gets second. His matches with Piper had more heat than the WWF is accustomed to having.

FEUD OF THE YEAR

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 1. FLAIR VS. FUNK (262) | 1,930 |
| 2. Flair vs. Steamboat (251) | 1,921 |
| 3. Tsuruta vs. Tenryu (35) | 538 |
| 4. Riger vs. Sano (24) | 496 |
| 5. Hogan vs. Savage (25) | 491 |

Honorable Mention: Brainbusters (Blanchard & Anderson) vs. Rockers (Michaels & Janetty) 279

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 – Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko
1981 – Andre the Giant vs. Killer Khan
1982 – Ted DiBiase vs. Junkyard Dog
1983 – Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
1984 – Freebirds vs. Von Erichs
1985 – Ted DiBiase vs. Jim Duggan
1986 – Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff
1987 – Jerry Lawler vs. Tommy Rich & Austin Idol
1988 – Midnight Express vs. Fantastics

MIKE OMANSKY: Flair–Funk was too overdone for me. The Hogan–Savage feud was the biggest thing in wrestling in 1989. Flair vs. Steamboat was brief, but potent, and produced some great matches.

PAUL HANLIN: I picked Flair's feud with Steamboat above his feud with Funk because the NWA didn't make Funk into the unstoppable killer heel they needed to going into Baltimore. Nobody thought for a minute that the title would change.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Flair and Steamboat had matches night-after-night between four and five stars. The three major matches are all among the top 10 or 20 matches of the entire decade. Some of their arena matches were just as good. If that doesn't merit this award, than nothing does. The stiff work in the Tsuruta vs. Tenryu feud was the jewel of the All Japan promotion. Not only did it elevate Tenryu to his deserved level of prominence, but hit revitalized Tsuruta's work rate making him good once again. Flair vs. Funk was a pleasure to watch seeing a variety of grueling matches which would have disabled most wrestlers. I enjoyed the feud from handshake-to-handshake.

STEVE SIMS: I put Steamboat vs. Flair first despite the gates as it was the highest quality feud I've ever seen. There was no real face, no real heel and all the heat was generated by pure wrestling. Hogan vs. Savage drew the biggest gates. Tsuruta vs. Tenryu, even after two years, was the hottest feud in Japan and excellent quality and originality in every match.

SCOTT HUDSON: Flair vs. Funk was perfect from start to finish. Flair vs. Steamboat wasn't as good because Steam-

boat wasn't as good a face as Funk was a heel. But the set-up and ring work were awe inspiring.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Flair vs. Funk and Flair vs. Steamboat both had great matches, but I give the nod to Flair vs. Funk because it was really a feud. In the Flair vs. Steamboat match, it was like there wasn't a babyface or a heel.

JOHN JANCE: Flair and Steamboat had the most consistently excellent matches in North America since the days of Dory Funk Jr. and Jack Brisco. to be able to compare matches to those is reason enough for this choice.

ROBERT SILBER: Every Steamboat–Flair match was not only a choice for match of the year, but for match of the decade. From the opening angle as Eddie Gilbert's mystery partner to the handshake at the end of Wrestle War, no pairing of two foes ever produced the quality that this feud did. In any other year, Flair vs. Funk would be an easy winner, but Flair vs. Steamboat may never be topped.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Flair vs. Steamboat was so far ahead of the pack that you may as well have polled for second best feud of the year, or for the decade for that matter.

JON KARESH: Although the matches in Flair–Steamboat were better, I consider an important aspect of a feud is a very popular babyface against a very hated heel and what appears to be a great dislike between the participants. It was hard to have this in Flair–Steamboat when so many people liked Flair and it was obvious the two respected each other so much. Flair–Funk had it all.

DAVID JACOBSON: Flair–Steamboat came at a time when the NWA was at its all-time low and at least kept them alive while they started the rebuilding process.

LANCE LEVINE: I don't care how many tickets were sold or what the buy rates for the matches were, we won't see ring work so good in a series of matches for years. The Flair vs. Steamboat feud came at a great time for the NWA because a lot of fans were losing hope.

LARRY LOVELL: Flair vs. Steamboat because it produced the year's best series of matches. I also liked the way Steamboat's return was handled on television and the brawl between the two of them in Cleveland. My second choice is Hogan vs. Savage because it was the top box office feud and Savage was very good in his role during the heel turn.

SMM: Tsuruta vs. Tenryu. For a feud into its third year, it should have been stale, but in fact, was even better than ever. Every match between these two guys seems like a brutal fight. It was All Japan's headline feud all year, and it was one of All Japan's best years ever, so for that reasoning, I put it ahead of Riger vs. Sano for first place.

JEFF BOWDREN: Flair vs. Steamboat. This feud didn't make as much money as Hogan vs. Savage, or even Flair vs. Funk, but for pure wrestling, this feud was without peer. I think that every wrestling school in the world should make these matches required viewing for every student.

MARK MADDEN: Flair–Steamboat had better matches, although nothing topped the I Quit match, but the roles in the Flair–Steamboat feud weren't clearly defined. The family man image Steamboat portrayed didn't get over mainly because most male wrestling fans aren't married to women that look like Bonnie Steamboat, so the reaction was mixed. Flair–Funk had a true good vs. bad division and some of the matches were so stiff they looked real. You could really believe that these two hated one another.

JOHN MCADAM: It's a toss-up between Flair vs. Steamboat and Flair vs. Funk. The matches were fantastic in both feuds, but I'd rather listen to Funk's interviews.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Flair vs. Funk has to win. The "I Quit" match was a perfect climax of the feud. You could feel the hatred in this one and the work was beyond compare. Flair vs. Steamboat gets second on work rate alone. Their matches generated a lot of heat, but it was more out of competition and awe than any hatred. Still, they were the best series of matches that I've ever seen. Hogan vs. Savage was tremendous with its story and set-up and the interviews but inconsistent in the ring.

JEFF MULLINS: Flair vs. Steamboat had a certain quality about them. Both were professionals who had a job to do and simply agreed to put on their best performances and kill each other. I can't think of any three consecutive matches this decade that I'd want to sit down and watch again and again anymore.

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1. MICHAELS & JANETTY (160) | 1,310 |
| 2. Blanchard & Anderson (127) | 1,308 |
| 3. Fuyuki & Kawada (127) | 1,137 |
| 4. Rick & Scott Steiner (104) | 928 |
| 5. Kroffat & Furnas (67) | 695 |

Honorable Mention: Eaton & Lane 290, Road Warriors 181, Tsuruta & Yatsu 148, Demolition 117

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Terry Gordy & Buddy Roberts
- 1981 - Terry Gordy & Jimmy Snuka
- 1982 - Stan Hansen & Ole Anderson
- 1983 - Ricky Steamboat & Jay Youngblood
- 1984 - Road Warriors
- 1985 - Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith
- 1986 - Bobby Eaton & Dennis Condrey
- 1987 - Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane
- 1988 - Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane

TED KUMLANDER: I can't say enough about the Steiners. They have the moves, the builds, the conditioning and the charisma.

CHRIS ZAVISA: If the Rockers wrestled for a promotion where they had better opponents I'd have picked them for this award. But they don't. A few great matches with Blanchard & Anderson do not make a tag team of the year. The Foot Loose excelled throughout the year with a variety of opponents. Their work rate is second to none and their teamwork is fun to watch.

LANCE LEVINE: The Steiners are so tough they scare me. Watching them work guys over is fun, but it's kind of scary because you know most of the foes limp into the locker room.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: The Steiners are scary. Two shooters who can really wrestle. Scott is amazing with his moves.

JON KARESH: That the Rockers could do so well in a promotion where wrestling ability is almost non-existent is a real tribute to their work.

SCOTT HUDSON: The Rockers were the most consistent team I saw this year. Every match I saw them in gave me more respect for them. The Steiners will win this next year if their work is the same and they remain a team.

JOHN MCADAM: I drop whatever I'm doing just to see the Steiners in squash matches.

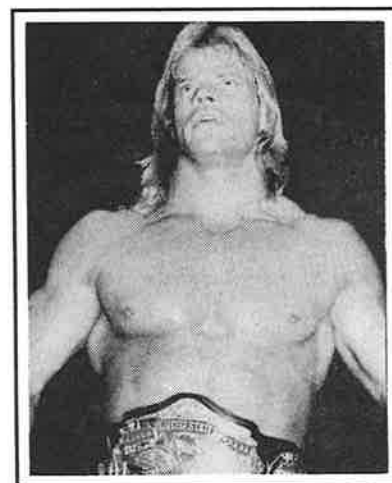
MARK MADDEN: I wouldn't get into a wrestling ring with the Steiners for any amount of money. For stiff work and stunning power moves, you can't beat them. I think the Steiners are what the Road Warriors are supposed to be. Big, strong men who can do power moves and wrestle. The Roadies are big and strong and can do power moves. The Foot Loose themselves received little exposure in the U.S. this year, but their moves got a lot. Most of the good American teams were copying them.

BRIAN TRAMEL: The Steiners represent what wrestling is all about, toughness, comedy and work rate.

BOB CLOSSON: The Rockers and Brainbusters may be the two best teams the WWF has ever had. The best team in the U.S. right now may be the Steiners, but the Foot Loose have remained consistent throughout the year. The Road Warriors proved this year that they can be great but they can also be dull.

ANDY STOWELL: I hated the Rock & Rolls, Fantastics and Dudes and all the pretty boy teams but you can't deny the work of the Rockers. They should have been given the belts in October. Their matches with the Brainbusters were fantastic and their marathon matches with the Rougeaus were well-paced.

ALEX MARVEZ: I think Kroffat & Furnas are the perfect blend. Kroffat does sound wrestling moves while Furnas can do nice high spots.



Lex Luger

MOST IMPROVED

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1. LEX LUGER (316) | 2,072 |
| 2. Scott Steiner (114) | 1,097 |
| 3. Rick Rude (91) | 1,045 |
| 4. Naoki Sano (19) | 292 |
| 5. Dan Kroffat (23) | 235 |

Honorable Mention: Doug Furnas 119, Jushin Riger 93, Great Muta 92

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Larry Zbyszko
- 1981 - Adrian Adonis
- 1982 - Jim Duggan
- 1983 - Curt Hennig
- 1984 - The Cobra
- 1985 - Steve Williams
- 1986 - Rick Steiner

1987 - Big Bubba Rogers (Big Bossman)
1988 - Sting

STEVE GENNARELLI: Based on athletic ability alone, Scott Steiner should be one of the top five stars of the 90s. Rude proved he could carry poor wrestlers to new heights. Third goes to Luger who is finally living up to the hype Bill Apter started for him four years ago.

PAUL HANLIN: Luger deserves many "allocades" for his transformation from being just okay into a legitimate top-20 wrestler. Rude belongs for his ability to carry the Supreme Roidhead past the negative two star mark.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The transformation of Luger is almost unbelievable. He has gone from hopeless to the hope of the future. He's one of the ten best wrestlers in this country. He had consistently great matches with Flair and Steamboat, which is no great accomplishment, but also pulled off very good matches with Steve Williams, Brian Pillman and even Tommy Rich. His interviews have become effective and his arrogant manner suits him well. Rude gets second for carrying Ultimate Warrior to a decent match, which I didn't think was possible. Many have forgotten that Rude did show some talent in the past so he didn't have as far to go as Luger.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Luger went from being a guy who could only have good matches with Flair to a guy who could have good matches with Tommy Rich. Sano went from being an unknown to being one of the top five in the business.

SCOTT HUDSON: Scott Steiner came out of nowhere to become one of the best in the sport. A sure bet to be a superstar in the 90s. Luger is no longer a wrestler everyone has to make excuses for. Ron Simmons as half of Doom is much better than I remember him without the hood.

ANTHONY AMARA: Luger improved drastically in 1989. He had a great match in Starrcade '88, but it was with Ric Flair who masters carrying lesser talents. However, last summer Luger kept pace with Steamboat and if that didn't make him the most improved wrestler, then Fall Brawl put to rest any doubts about his progress. Tommy Rich, a no-name, despite Cornette's on-air hard-sell history lesson, was carried to his last great match by Luger.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: No doubt about it, Lex Luger. Remember all the Lex Luger jokes? No more. He has amazed me with his selling and his stamina. He needs help on interviews but he should be the man by the mid-90s.

JEFF BOWDREN: Starting with Starrcade '88, Luger has shown tremendous improvement. His overall persona, both in and out of the ring, has become top-notch. Whether he's improved enough to be World champion is something we will have to wait and find out. Scott Steiner gets second. He's come so far that the NWA should start giving him some consideration as a World title contender. Doug Furnas used to only do strength moves and a few leaps, but is starting to put it all together.

MARK MADDEN: Steiner went from a mid-card guy in the CWA to being one of the best in the NWA, which says something for Lawler and Jarrett's eye for spotting new talent, but also says something for Steiner. His style is great. He's learned to rely on his strength while developing a few hot moves to emphasize his athletic ability. Luger has gone from being a good big wrestler to being a good wrestler, which is a big transition.

JOHN MCADAM: It's hard to believe that Lex Luger is the same guy who used to mangle jobbers with his clumsiness and blow up just doing an interview. The most impressive

thing about Luger is that he'd be a big star even if he stayed just being a stiff.

BOB CLOSSON: The king of the Frankensteiner deserves this one. Where were all those moves when he was in the CWA earlier this year?

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Luger looked great at Starrcade '88 but showed nowhere near the fluidity and ring presence that he does now. It's almost gotten to the point that when Luger's there, you expect to get a good match. He's had to carry his share of people this year, something he never could have done in the past.

ALEX MARVEZ: How can you not love an over-the-hill wrestler who makes the most out of a push and improves the quality of his matches. Momota-mania was one of the highlights of the year.

RICH KERIN: When Scott Steiner first hit the NWA scene, he was good. Now he's becoming one of the top performers in the country. He may be the man to be NWA champion in a few years.

MOST UNIMPROVED

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. JIM DUGGAN (132) | 860 |
| 2. Red Rooster (44) | 413 |
| 3. Barry Windham (46) | 375 |
| 4. Jerry Lawler (23) | 273 |
| 5. Dick Murdoch (24) | 266 |
| Akeem (16) | 266 |

Honorable Mention: Andre the Giant 210, Owen Hart 156, Hercules 153, Hiroshi Hase 144, Dusty Rhodes 138, Stan Lane 137, Ultimate Warrior 130, Jake Roberts 123, Ted DiBiase 108, Tommy Rich 91, Dino Bravo 85, Sting 84

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Jimmy Snuka
1985 - Sgt. Slaughter
1986 - Bob Orton
1987 - Butch Reed
1988 - Bam Bam Bigelow

RICH KERIN: It's really hard to believe that Duggan is the same man who once brawled his way to the top of the Mid-South area. His matches were great at the time. That's long forgotten for a piece of wood and a nice paycheck.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Terry Taylor went from being one of the best wrestlers in the world to being just an average jobber.

TERESA DEMARIE: Truthfully Duggan didn't get any worse any faster than last year, but he sure stunk up a few cards I attended this year. He's the only man that could be sued by a 2x4 for ruination of character. Barry Windham is one of the top three pure wrestlers in the game, now he's overweight, over lazy and looks like someone who just aimlessly wandered in from a Bonanza set. Taylor gets third, but Badnews Brown deserves some mention for finally looking like the "beer-bellied sharecropper" that he calls the fans.

BRIAN TRAMEL: No matter how good a heel Jerry Lawler is, his work rate has gone downhill ever since he won the AWA title. He did almost nothing but stall all year.

JOHN VAN VALER: There have been more sightings of Big Foot over the past few months than of Barry Windham. He's gone from being just about the best wrestler in the

world to nothing, despite being given all the opportunities in both the NWA and the WWF.

LANCE LEVINE: Not that Jim Duggan was anything special at the start of the year, but I still cringe when I think of some of his classic Mid South matches from not all that long ago.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: I know that Hulk Hogan doesn't have to work, but "Mr. Repeat" is the most predictable and boring big star in the history of the business. Without a doubt, Jimmy Garvin got a big push and did little or nothing with it.

JON KARESH: I don't care how good Owen Hart may be right now, his tenure in the WWF represented perhaps the biggest non-injury related decline in modern wrestling history.

JOHN JANCE: John Studd used to be excruciating to watch during his original feud with "Andrea." But when he came back as a face, for no apparent reason, he regressed, which I would have thought would be impossible. Whereas the extent of his wrestling last time was waving a bag of Andre's hair, lately he looked like he was going to keel over every time he raised his arm's in the air.

BOB CLOSSON: Can't pick the Ultimate Warrior because he started at rock bottom. Duggan and Valentine have been wastes of time for years. Andre is a sorry excuse for a wrestler but has been one for years. But the only who went in the wrong direction the farthest is Terry Taylor. He's got the potential to be a great star but is stuck with one of the most derogatory gimmicks ever. It's really sad when you know the guy could have some great matches.

CLINT FREEMAN: Taylor's feud with Brooklyn Brawler laid an egg and so does his entire gimmick. Poor Barry Windham. He went from being the next NWA champion to a window-dresser in a cartoon fun house before his career sailed out to sea.

TRENT WALTERS: Davey Boy Smith is the only wrestler who left the WWF and had better matches in the WWF than when he left.

MARK MADDEN: Hiroshi Hase should have been one of the best wrestlers in the world in 1989. Now he may be phased out by 1990. Injuries have slowed him down, but his work seems uninspired. But he's still good and there is hope for a rebound. Jim Duggan and Jerry Lawler are a whole lot worse than Hase, but neither had as far to fall. They both stink now, though.

MIKE GENDELMAN: Hiroshi Hase apparently lost his fire and charisma when they stopped pushing him. He couldn't have lost all that skill, however. Jake Roberts and Dick Murdoch both went from being pretty good to being really bad this year.

SCOTT HUDSON: Jim Duggan used to be one of the best brawlers around. Now he's just another overrated poor worker which is really too bad when you watch a tape of him from just three-and-a-half years ago.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Last year Owen Hart and Barry Windham were front-runners in almost every category. Sadly, this is the only vote either of them will get this year from me. I realize some would argue that their promotion and positioning were partly responsible, but their Titan employment was a direct result of their own business decisions.

SAM NORD: Jim Duggan has reached the point where he can do little but stuck out his thumb and yell.

CHRIS ZAVISA: There was once a time when Duggan used to be a lot of fun to watch. His wild brawling perfectly balanced his on the edge goofiness. Now the brawling is gone and he's just goofy. Tommy Rich hasn't been very good for a while, but you would think his last big chance would have rekindled some kind of a spark. Despite dropping some weight, Rich showed why he was the youngest has-been in the history of the business. The \$100,000 that the NWA shelled out to pay Dick Murdoch was a sad waste.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Last year Terry Taylor had to learn to play the role of a mediocre wrestler. This year he perfected it.

MOST OBNOXIOUS

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | DUSTY RHODES (146) | 964 |
| 2. | Vince McMahon (68) | 711 |
| 3. | Ed Whalen (59) | 431 |
| 4. | Ultimate Warrior (25) | 340 |
| 5. | Hulk Hogan (26) | 296 |

Honorable Mention: Eric Embry 279, Verne Gagne 249, Jose Gonzales 175, Jim Duggan 128, Carlos Colon 115, Gary Hart 114, Brother Love 98, Lord Al Hayes 90, Mean Gene Okerlund 88, Roddy Piper 84

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - "Judo" Gene LeBelle
1982 - David Crockett
1983 - Vince McMahon
1984 - Vince McMahon
1985 - Vince McMahon
1986 - Vince McMahon
1987 - David Crockett
1988 - Dusty Rhodes

GARY CAHILL: Ruining his federation wouldn't be enough to call someone obnoxious, but for his Brody comments, I have to give the nod to Verne Gagne.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Verne Gagne's continual shilling of the AWA plus his Brody line capture first place. If Verne wins in this category, I'd have to say that he probably got what he was asking for.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Eric Embry gets first for continually shoving himself down the throats of the poor people in Texas. They had to suffer enough with the Cowboys this season.

MIKE LYON: I've had the displeasure of meeting Mr. Rhodes a number of times. He's a self-centered, rude pig.

STEVE YOHE: Dusty Rhodes bothers me a lot more in the WWF. It seems like he tries to flaunt his ineptitude. Verne Gagne, who is getting everything he deserves, gets second.

PAUL HANLIN: Vince McMahon makes me ashamed to be a wrestling fan. Carlos Colon gets second for all the obvious reasons. Coming on with a strong late surge is Verne Gagne. The three are total contemptible sleaze.

SCOTT HUDSON: For Verne Gagne to insinuate that Bruiser Brody got what he deserved is perhaps the single most obnoxious statement that I've heard in my entire life. Dusty Rhodes grandstand play in the NWA before he left was good enough for second.

ANTHONY AMARA: Many who follow pro wrestling knew that Verne Gagne wasn't an intelligent businessman. But few knew that Verne Gagne was vile.

LARRY LOVELL: My first choice is the Anabolic Warrior whose spaz act and inane interviews coupled with his lack of ability earn the vote. Second goes to Eric Embry because of how he changed things in the USWA similar to how Dusty Rhodes changed things in the NWA. He actually made you feel sorry for Kerry Von Erich the way he buried him with Taras Bulba.

JEFF BOWDREN: As much as I dislike Monsoon the buffoon, I'll admit he's never sabotaged an angle just because he didn't like it like Ed Whalen did with the Dynamite Kid and Davey Boy Smith feud.

MARK MADDEN: When Dusty Rhodes was covered with the brown stuff in his infamous WWF plumber's skit, it was the closest to truth in packaging that the WWF has ever come. He's fat and getting fatter. He's bad and getting badder, he's the Dusty-Man, oh, year, that what he am. Terry Funk said it best. Take away the 50 pounds of added fat, the 50 pounds of inflated ego and the 50 pounds of hot air and what do you have? A heartless jackass. That's what you've got. His WWF defection shows that not only has he no wrestling ability, but his integrity is in short supply as well.

JOHN JANCE: Gordon Solie is the most overrated announcer of all-time. He comes across as so condescending during the Power Hour. His inclusion of WWF news was overbearing, especially since he gave the WWF credibility instead of using the forum to release certain information to their disadvantage such as Jake Roberts' absence because of his arrest or Arn Anderson's quitting the promotion.

GREG ANDERSON: Vince McMahon's performance on Entertainment Tonight was a great indication of the man's arrogance and penchant for lying. Too bad the general public doesn't see through him and realize just how much the "non-competition" really does bother him.

TRENT WALTERS: Ed Whalen for his stance and actions concerning pro wrestling.

JOHN MCADAM: Does anyone get a sick as I do listening to Gorilla Baboon shamelessly hard-sell Titan PPV shows? My favorite is when he says, "Don't come crying to me if you call too late to order." I won't, but can I ask you for a refund?

ALEX MARVEZ: Ed Whalen is so obnoxious that I can't even watch tapes of Stampede wrestling.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: I hate to put Ric Flair here, but he just got on my nerves worse than anyone. There was too much Dusty in Flair this year. He hotshotted and got himself slaughtered so many times in such a short period that it was disgusting.

BEST ON INTERVIEWS

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. | TERRY FUNK (271) | 1,730 |
| 2. | Jim Cornette (122) | 1,110 |
| 3. | Ric Flair (60) | 807 |
| 4. | Randy Savage (15) | 377 |
| 5. | Paul E. Dangerously (22) | 316 |

Honorable Mention: Roddy Piper 257, Rick Steiner 183, Jerry Lawler 159, Lex Luger 113, Scotty the Body 80

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Lou Albano and Roddy Piper (tied)
- 1982 - Roddy Piper
- 1983 - Roddy Piper
- 1984 - Jimmy Hart
- 1985 - Jim Cornette
- 1986 - Jim Cornette
- 1987 - Jim Cornette
- 1988 - Jim Cornette

JEFF MULLINS: Larry Zbyszko's defensive whine, sarcasm and ability to inject current news topics into his interviews are appreciated by those of us who never owned, do not own, and never will own a Hulk Hogan bandanna.

FRANK SHANLEY: I recently saw a series of interviews from the All Japan women and much preferred the way they behaved to the "yell at the camera" style of the American wrestlers. Even though I couldn't understand a word they said, they still made more sense to me that a lot of the Americans.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Even though Piper was excellent in the WWF, his best interviews were in Portland.

MIKE WOOD: Listen you all obnoxious, overbearing, blown-up sideshow steroid freaks, Professor Terry Funk will now give you a series of lessons in the art of giving a professional wrestling interview. But, wait a minute, will any of you simple-minded jackasses even bother to listen and learn?

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Terry Funk nearly carried the TBS show by himself during the summer. Throughout his feud with Flair he

was the most consistent interview in the business. He could generate every emotion within you, fear, hatred, awe and admiration.

MARK MADDEN: Terry Funk should have won this the minute he swung the chain saw into Dusty Rhodes' effigy in Florida. His work in Florida, if anything, was more manic than his work in the NWA, although he came through with some crucial mic work in the NWA during the height of his feud with Flair. The skit with the Ric Flair "look alike" (Ron Aames, the guy with the yellow streak down his back), was priceless.



Gary Hart and
Terry Funk

JEFF BOWDREN: Cornette was restrained for most of the year as a babyface, but his recent turn has turned him loose again. Funk gets second. As good as his NWA stuff was, his best interviews were in Florida including when he sawed the Michelin Man in half in tribute to the tub of goo Dusty Rhodes.

TERESA DEMARIE: Piper had a rough spot at Wrestlemania and his first few shows on Prime Time. Overall he's been far more entertaining than the rest of the bunch. His interview for the woman who needed a liver in Portland was the best and most useful interview of the year. His Survivor Series interviews considering the silliness factor and his teammates would have been a nightmare for anyone else but he made them work.

STEVE SIMS: Terry Funk had the three best interviews of the year. The chain saw interview in Florida, the "Ric Flaire" interview and the "That's no woman" interview.

STEVE GENNARELLI: The main reason I watched any NWA programs this year was to see and hear Funk. Second goes to Savage, who with or without Sherri was very effective.

MOST CHARISMATIC

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 1. HULK HOGAN (237) | 2,083 |
| 2. Akira Maeda (125) | 1,377 |
| 3. Ultimate Warrior (160) | 1,369 |
| 4. Sting (44) | 492 |
| 5. Ric Flair (26) | 388 |

Honorable Mention: Roddy Piper 142, Sid Vicious 80

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Ric Flair
 1981 - Michael Hayes
 1982 - Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair (tied)
 1983 - Ric Flair
 1984 - Ric Flair
 1985 - Hulk Hogan
 1986 - Hulk Hogan
 1987 - Hulk Hogan
 1988 - Sting

RICH KERIN: Hulk Hogan still pops a crowd the second he walks out to the arena like no other wrestler. The way he plays to the crowd is still a sight to see live. Some may call it show boating or obnoxious on his part but it gets fans to the arena which is the name of the game.

TERESA DEMARIE: Hogan and Piper are the two strongest examples of different types of charisma. Hogan has tremendous physical charisma. He would stand out in a crowd without ever having to open his mouth. Has little outside of his size and persona as he proved in No Holds Barred. Piper has tons of charisma, all coming from personality and none from his size. Animated and charming, even as a heel, with qualities you usually don't find in wrestlers.

SCOTT HUDSON: Hogan gets a huge pop just for showing up for a shopping mall opening. Sting would need a great feud plus a run as World champion to even come close, but right now he can't make the top three. Warrior gets second because he's over just because he has a weird body. If Akira Maeda doesn't have charisma to sell all those tickets, then who does?

ANTHONY ADAMS: Maeda's the most charismatic, and he can wrestle, too. Hogan can't wrestle, but he's charismatic. Warrior's charismatic, and he probably can't even spell the word let alone wrestle, but he can still get heat.

DAVID JACOBSEN: Never has anyone gotten so far in the wrestling business by doing as little as the Ultimate Warrior.

JON KARESH: Maeda has to have the most charisma of any wrestler ever to do what he's done.

LANCE LEVINE: The Warrior is so "over" that it's a disgrace. By running to the ring, shaking the ropes like a madman and using massive doses of steroids, he's got fans convinced he's a great wrestler.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Maeda is the most over wrestler in the world. What gives him this award over Hogan is that he's so over and the Japanese should know better. He's only the third best wrestler in his promotion. In a country that prides itself on honor, he became a hero for a cowardly blind-side attack. Hogan not only packs them in but turns them into a rabid pack when he goes through his routine.

BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. JUSHIN RIGER (93) | 786 |
| 2. Ric Flair (112) | 777 |
| 3. Ricky Steamboat (58) | 626 |
| 4. Nobuhiko Takada (73) | 515 |
| 5. Akira Maeda (35) | 384 |

Honorable Mention: Mr. Perfect 270, Great Muta 264, Owen Hart 255, Scott Steiner 239, Bret Hart 236, Genichiro Tenryu 195, Kazuo Yamazaki 192, Ted DiBiase 137, Hiroshi Hase 116, Rick Steiner 111, Dan Kroffat 109, Joe Malenko 85, Yoshiaki Fujiwara 85

PREVIOUS WINNERS

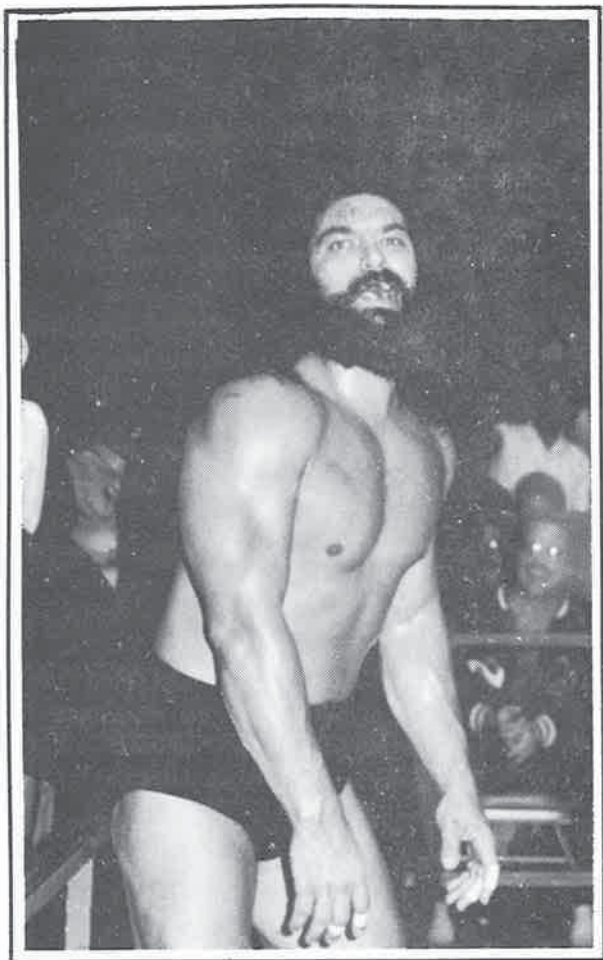
- 1980 - Bob Backlund
 1981 - Ted DiBiase
 1982 - Satoru Sayama
 1983 - Satoru Sayama
 1984 - Dynamite Kid and Masa Saito (tied)
 1985 - Tatsumi Fujinami
 1986 - Tatsumi Fujinami
 1987 - Nobuhiko Takada
 1988 - Tatsumi Fujinami

CHRIS ZAVISA: Although I'm not a fan of the UWF style, Takada's brilliance is evident every time he steps into the ring. His match against Bob Backlund was a thing of beauty. When wrestling is done right, you suspend your knowledge and truly believe in the reality of the contest. The UWF strives for this effect but usually is only able to sustain the feeling for fleeting moments. Backlund and Takada sustained it from bell-to-bell and I give most of the credit to Takada. Steamboat was the best in the United States.

ERNIE SANTILLI: The Great Muta is a gifted athlete who matured tremendously over the past year. He mastered a lot of subtleties and earns my respect for being the first man I've seen billed as a karateka whose technique actually reflects a legitimate knowledge of it.

ANTHONY AMARA: Keiji Muto is unbelievable. He's a high-flying kamikaze, an accomplished mat wrestler, the fastest executor of moves and uses the best looking and most bizarre submission holds.

JEFF BOWDREN: Takada was far and away the best this year. He even carried Bob Backlund to a good match. Flair gets second, primarily for his ability to adapt to so many different styles this year and still always have a good match.



Bruiser Brody

**BRUISER BRODY MEMORIAL AWARD
(BEST BRAWLER)**

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. TERRY FUNK (368) | 2,130 |
| 2. Genichiro Tenryu (47) | 683 |
| 3. Terry Gordy (29) | 599 |
| 4. Ric Flair (20) | 571 |
| 5. Stan Hansen (48) | 481 |

Honorable Mention: Steve Williams 140, Barry Windham 80

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1980 – Bruiser Brody
 1981 – Bruiser Brody
 1982 – Bruiser Brody
 1983 – Bruiser Brody
 1984 – Bruiser Brody
 1985 – Stan Hansen
 1986 – Terry Gordy
 1987 – Bruiser Brody
 1988 – Bruiser Brody

STEVE GENNARELLI: For bringing back an aura of violence back to U.S. rings, Terry Funk.

ANDY STOWELL: Funk easily the best for his brawls with Flair. The fact he was working hurt most of the time makes him even that much more impressive.

TERESA DEMARIE: Funk is the only one I can consider a truly legitimate candidate. Works hard, throws a decent punch and sells well and has a face to give the brawls credibility. Only drawback is lack of size.

MARK MADDEN: The Funk-Flair matches were so brutal that they looked real, especially the Troy match. Stiff, chops, good-looking punches and even some street fighting tactics thrown in. I'm a big believer that the best wrestling is when it looks as realistic as possible while still entertaining the fans. The Funk-Flair matches define that concept exactly.

DAVID HANNAH: A lot of people may not like to hear this, but Terry Funk was better in 1989 than Brody was during all the years that he won. He sells so much better.

STEVE SCHONBERGER: Funk and Flair beat each other senseless the two times I saw them in Pittsburgh. Funk set the tone and carried Flair in this style.

STEVE SIMS: Terry Funk throughout the year has gotten all his heat through his bumps and his brawling. He's exemplified as much as anyone the Bruiser Brody spirit of the award.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Funk's antics carried the NWA over the last six months of the year. The great post-match brawl which set up the Flair & Sting vs. Funk & Muta match was one of the best in years.

RICH KERIN: Terry Funk would have made Frank Goodish proud if he had seen him work this past year. Funk brought out the meaning of the word by stomping, pile driving and brawling his way to the top of the NWA. The NWA was a better promotion this year because of him.

BEST FLYING WRESTLER

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. JUSHIN RIGER (373) | 1,885 |
| 2. Naoki Sano (12) | 696 |
| 3. Great Muta (38) | 502 |
| 4. Owen Hart (29) | 265 |
| Brian Pillman (20) | 265 |

Honorable Mention: Atlantis 219, Super Boy 121, Super Astro 97, Bobby Eaton 88

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 – Jimmy Snuka
 1982 – Satoru Sayama
 1983 – Satoru Sayama
 1984 – Dynamite Kid
 1985 – Tiger Mask
 1986 – Tiger Mask
 1987 – Owen Hart
 1988 – Owen Hart

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Riger was spectacular this year. I could watch his matches all day, especially against Sano.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Japanese excel over the Mexicans because truly effective aerial wrestling must be within the context of a good match and serve a purpose. That is what separates Jushin Riger from many Mexican wrestlers who can fly with reckless abandon but are poor-to-mediocre wrestlers. Riger gets first, but if he can win it next year it will be a great surprise to me. I don't see how anybody can do what he does and last longer than a few matches.

SAM NORD: Riger does moves that I once thought to be only science fiction. Toshiaki Kawada is probably the best at doing flying moves that make sense in a match, but he doesn't do the suicidal stuff that Riger does. Muta gets third for introducing U.S. fans to moves like the moonsault press and the handspring elbow.

SMM: I'd like to mention Cactus Jack and Dynamite Kid for their crazy bumps. Speaking of crazy bumps, how about Akira Nogami splattering himself on the guard rail? He deserves a mention for that one. The Mexicans are all really strong here. Nobody stands out, so I'll pick All Star, who did a lot of good stuff. But the first two are Riger and Sano. Every time they have a match, they will do some kind of flying move and you'll wonder where they even thought it up from and why would anyone even want to try it.

MOST OVERRATED

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 1. ULTIMATE WARRIOR (292) | 2,040 |
| 2. Hulk Hogan (84) | 929 |
| 3. Dino Bravo (58) | 483 |
| 4. Dusty Rhodes (29) | 447 |
| 5. Eric Embry (6) | 191 |

Honorable Mention: Andre the Giant 151, Sid Vicious 149, Jerry Lawler 131, Brutus Beefcake 130, Jim Duggan 108, Zeus 92

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Mr. Wrestling II
- 1981 - Pedro Morales
- 1982 - Pedro Morales
- 1983 - Bob Backlund
- 1984 - Big John Studd
- 1985 - Hulk Hogan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan
- 1987 - Dusty Rhodes
- 1988 - Dusty Rhodes

RICH KERIN: The No. 2 man in the WWF is a chemical monster who can wrestle for no longer than 45 seconds at a time or his lungs explode. He really doesn't wrestle, either. He runs into the ring, takes a few minutes to catch his breath, lifts his opponent over his head, drops him and jumps on the man's back for the pin. Fans love it, but it isn't wrestling.

DAVID JACOBSEN: Hulk Hogan is the biggest draw around, he's popular with the kids, and seems to have teflon coating on for not getting blasted for all the things he's done, but he is still like watching a repeat film of himself. His matches aren't the slightest bit creative and he's a lousy interview.

JOHN JANCE: By virtue of his holding the IC title and how over he is with the fans, and considering he'll be the next WWF champion, the Anabolic Warrior deserves recognition for advancing farther with less ability than anyone ever.

GARY CAHILL: Canada's strongest man is given wrestling's most illogical push.

ALEX MARVEZ: Why does Dino Bravo get pushed? At least Hogan and Anabolic Warrior have charisma. Bravo is not only a poor wrestler and a poor interview, but he's got ugly hair.

SMM: As far as by smart fans, I'd say Sting. Well all know Hogan is overrated. But I never bought that he was the man to build a promotion around as he's so limited in what he can do. The Road Warriors are also overrated. They're good but they're not great. The most is Roddy Piper. He hasn't been that good in the ring since the Mid Atlantic days and even then he was never great in the ring.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Have the Road Warriors drawn a dime in the last year? They aren't bad workers, but they can't carry a promotion like everyone once thought. Second is Lawler. Just because he's great on interviews and has had

great matches in the past, most smart fans think he's a great worker.

MARK MADDEN: The Ultimate Warrior is the worst wrestler who has a major title so I think he should win this. When Eric Embry threw up in the Sportatorium ring, he was only doing what many wrestling fans felt like doing all year due to Embry's relentless self-promotion.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Nobody comes close to Hogan. Because he's been champion for so long, Vince expects me to believe that he's one of the greatest athletes of all-time. Cut it out!

TERESA DEMARIE: I question whether Dusty should be allowed to do anything but work on someone's toilet. The man has little unforced charisma, no wrestling talent and seems to be waiting for a part as a clown for Ringling Brothers should a casting call ever go out. He couldn't even outrun an old lady unless the race was downhill and he went on his side to roll.

JOHN MCADAM: Dino Bravo is No. 1, but it's time somebody blew the whistle on the Road Warriors. They don't draw. They don't sell. They don't work. When they turned them, it failed. They're boring, but they're still pushed as the top NWA tag team ahead of a lot of guys who would mean more if they would get the shot.

SAM NORD: Brutus Beefcake gets a push for being Hulk Hogan's buddy. Ultimate Warrior gets a push for being the biggest steroid freak. Dino Bravo gets a push for being French-Canadian. Needless to say, none of them get pushed for being able to wrestle.

MOST UNDERRATED

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. DAN KROFFAT (93) | 618 |
| 2. Bret Hart (46) | 433 |
| 3. Chris Benoit (20) | 401 |
| 4. Brad Armstrong (41) | 322 |
| 5. Eddie Gilbert (40) | 316 |

Honorable Mention: Tim Horner 298, Owen Hart 297, Red Rooster 230, Shawn Michaels 191, Bobby Eaton 168, Scott Steiner 164, Jushin Riger 143, Mr. Perfect 116, Ricky Steamboat 113, Scotty the Body 110, Cactus Jack Manson 85, Johnny Smith 85, Mike Rotunda 84

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Iron Sheik
- 1981 - Buzz Sawyer
- 1982 - Adrian Adonis
- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Brian Blair
- 1985 - Bobby Eaton
- 1986 - Bobby Eaton
- 1987 - Brad Armstrong
- 1988 - Tiger Mask

ANDY STOWELL: If Chris Adams hadn't spent his career in Texas he'd have been a much bigger star. Great moves, great interviews and works well as both a babyface and as a heel.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Mike Rotunda. What a talent. The only thing that holds him back is his mic work, and that's decent. He's been pushed to the bottom since the break-up of the Varsity Club (a big mistake) and it's a shame because he's one of the best in the ring. Eddie Gilbert had a great first half of the year but now he's only a memory. He has the talent and charisma and should be in a strong tag team

with a push. Bret Hart is better than almost anyone in the WWF but wrestling is on the back burner there.

TODD STUTTS: Bret Hart has everything it takes to be pushed as a major star but he continues to be kept at the middle-of-the-card level.

GARY CAHILL: For all that he's capable of being, I think Brian Pillman is quickly getting lost in the shuffle.

TERESA DEMARIE: Poor Ted DiBiase. He's one of the best workers in the business and he's constantly putting people over. The fans don't believe Ted can beat anyone.

SMM: By smart fans I'd say Dennis Condrey. He's been put down since the Midnight Express days but he was great in CWF. He was always compared with Bobby Eaton but even then he was a real good wrestler. Of the UWF guys, Shigeo Miyato gets overlooked the most. He works very hard and usually takes a real beating.

MARK MADDEN: Dan Kroffat teamed with a green power lifter to form one of the best and most popular tag teams in Japan. His aerial tactics and mat skills are both well above average. While he wouldn't draw any money in the NWA, he'd make the middle of the card a lot more interesting.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: Takada is the best wrestler in the UWF. I don't know why Shunji Takano isn't given a decent push considering his size and talent. Although George Takano held the tag team title, I still think he could be a bigger star.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Gary Young has really worked hard all year but nobody ever says anything good about him.

JEFF BOWDREN: Every time I hear people talk about Sting as a superstar of the future I wonder how long its going to take for them to wake up and realize that the superstar of the future is right under their nose. Give Scott Steiner a while to develop a little more personality and you'll really have something special.

DAVID HANNAH: The most underrated tag team is Super Boy & Relampago. Relampago is more underrated than Super Boy because nobody ever talks about him. Relampago does this spot where he lands on his feet after a backdrop twice, once like Tim Horner and the second time like Hector Guerrero. He then gets his leg caught by his opponent and does a back flip and lands on his feet. He then lands on his feet after a snap mare and lands on his feet after two monkey flips and doesn't even stumble in between like Owen Hart.

BOB CLOSSON: Brad Armstrong. This should probably be called the Brad Armstrong award since he defines what being underrated is all about. Not only does he never get a push but the fans don't seem to be impressed by him either.

JOHN MCADAM: It's sad to see the NWA waste Eddie Gilbert's ring work, creativity and overall persona. What could be worse than the "tweener" role he's been playing of late? My second pick is Chris Benoit, a tremendous worker. If he doesn't find some charisma and personality, he could become the Tim Horner of the 90s.

SCOTT HUDSON: Scott Steiner was in his brother's shadow most of the year but that appears to have changed of late. Scotty the Body is over in Portland and will be over big nationwide soon. Cactus Jack Manson may be getting his shot now that he's deserved for a while.

STEVE SIMS: It's too bad Brad Armstrong & Tim Horner have little charisma. They are so good that they might make a babyface manager worthwhile. I'm a bigger fan of Doug

Furnas than anyone I know. I think his dropkick is my favorite maneuver in all of wrestling. He's not as good as Dan Kroffat, but how many people are? With his combination of strength, speed and agility, he'd be a great addition to the NWA.

SAM NORD: Horner is one of the most talented wrestlers around but he wrestles in a circuit where talent is considered a drawback.

BEST PROMOTION

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION (279) | 2,115 |
| 2. All Japan Pro Wrestling (218) | 1,601 |
| 3. New Japan Pro Wrestling (45) | 965 |
| 4. National Wrestling Alliance (90) | 827 |
| 5. World Wrestling Federation (48) | 577 |

Honorable Mention: Don Owen Promotions 183

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Jim Crockett Promotions
1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
1985 - All Japan Pro Wrestling
1986 - Universal Wrestling Federation (U.S.)
1987 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
1988 - New Japan Pro Wrestling

VICKI LAUGHLIN: All Japan is an excellent promotion but now that New Japan has its junior heavyweight division back in tact, it's the best.

MIKE LYON: The WWF because it took wrestling out of the closet and made it a legitimate business.

STEVE YOHE: All Japan had a great year because it had great wrestling and clean finishes in every match. Did anyone in the U.S. learn anything from them? The NWA gets second because it had the only great wrestling in the United States. The UWF gets third. It made money because it seemed like it was real. If Akira Maeda came to the United States, McMahon would give him a pet bird and not push him because he'd think he couldn't draw because he was foreign. The NWA would paint his face and say he's the grandson of Mr. Moto.

PAUL HANLIN: It's hard to argue against All Japan. Thanks to Baba, who mandated clean finishes in all the big matches they had a great year. He gets a major gripe from me for devaluing the NWA title when Steamboat went there in mid-March. That was inexcusable. But the best promotion is the UWF. Despite the atrocious split card in Tokyo and the tragic death of a trainee in March, their impact can't be denied, overlooked or scoffed at.

CHRIS ZAVISA: What Baba did with All Japan was a stroke of genius. He placed more emphasis on the younger and harder working guys. He went to clean finishes in every big match, increased the work rate and cut some of the dead wood away. Baba also showed tons of class in his Bruiser Brody tribute complete with televising several hours of Brody matches. The Soviet invasion in New Japan made for poor and boring heavyweight matches, but the ascension of Riger, Sano and Nogami have rekindled my interest in the promotion. UWF gets third, making it a clean sweep for the Japanese. You can't argue with Maeda's box-office success.

STEVE SIMS: I chose All Japan first because they had the best actual wrestling, not boring UWF mat style wrestling and no inexperienced Russians. New Japan gets second because of its renewed push on the lighter weight wrestlers and because of their successful gamble with the Russians.

SCOTT HUDSON: All Japan could have conceivably been the No. 4 promotion in that country by the end of this year. It is now at least No. 2. The UWF is mysterious but successful. The NWA has made 180 percent progress during this past year. They are on their way to becoming a great promotion in the 90s.

LAZARUS DOBELSKY: All Japan had great matches and terrific heat at almost every card. New Japan bombed out with the usage of the Soviets. UWF gets second for their business sense and they give fans exactly what they want to see. NWA gets third. Their wrestling was excellent this year.

SMM: How can you not vote for the UWF after what it has done all year. The success has been unbelievable. I don't think it is all because of Maeda, but the strength of the entire group and the aura. They have a big advantage in that they run monthly. Second goes to All Japan. They probably run as good an operation as could be. They came into the year struggling but through giving the people what they want, they had a great year.

LANCE LEVINE: Despite all the criticism levelled for hardcore angles and lack of direction, the NWA put on four excellent PPV cards this year and the match quality actually is above 1988 levels.

MARK MADDEN: All Japan is No. 1 in my book because they draw good crowds and provide a good product. Baba's give the people what they want tactics along with his talented group of workers has maintained the Japanese fans' interest consistently. The UWF's crowds are great, but the product is too narrow. The NWA's product is good, but I was at enough house shows to know that it should be presented in a slightly different fashion. The other people in attendance felt the same way.

TODD STUTTS: The only reason I give the WWF first place is based on success and that alone.

JOHN MCADAM: I know they ran deep into the red this year, but the NWA put on the best television shows, the best PPV and the best live shows. If you consider WWF, let me address this. Remember Economics class and the dreaded "widgets?" Let's say you, the consumer, use widgets and prefer widget N over widget W. Then you read in the Wall Street Journal that widget W's company made a killing last year and widget N's company has financial problems. Do you then vote widget W as the best widget in the widget kay-fabe sheet poll?

BOB CLOSSON: Selling 40,000 tickets in one day tells you what the promotion of the year is.

TERESA DEMARIE: If success is the measure of the award, than the UWF takes it easily. The WWF gets second as they are the most successful U.S. promotion although they pushed a lot of garbage this year and the box office is starting to show it. Portland was the most exciting small promotion, benefitting from interesting booking and Roddy Piper for much of the year.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: For business alone you have to give it to the UWF. Nobody in North America could ever pull off what they have. NWA gets second. Its business at the house shows may have been terrible, but nobody can argue that when they were hot, the NWA was tremendous to watch.

MIKE WOOD: All Japan gets first because of Baba's desire to give the audience what they want to see, even when it isn't what he likes. Whatever he gives up in pride by putting himself in the ring he makes up for in the respect everyone has in him as a promoter.

BEST TELEVISION SHOW

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING (209) | 1,272 |
| 2. NWA World Championship Wrestling (134) | 1,036 |
| 3. New Japan Pro Wrestling (51) | 1,008 |
| 4. Portland Wrestling (48) | 716 |
| 5. WWF Superstars (77) | 691 |

Honorable Mention: NWA Power Hour 496, NWA Main Event 284, WWF Prime Time Wrestling 253

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1984 - New Japan Pro Wrestling
- 1985 - Mid South Wrestling
- 1986 - UWF Wrestling (U.S.)
- 1987 - CWA 90 minute Memphis show
- 1988 - New Japan Pro Wrestling

KEVIN MAFFEI: I really like the combination on NWA Power Hour of better than average matches, great segments like WNN and Funk's Grill and great announcing by Ross and Cornette.

ANTHONY AMARA: The best thing to happen to TV wrestling in 1989 was the Turner take-over of the NWA. The new NWA shows improved drastically by resembling the old UWF shows of Bill Watts. This is poetic justice because two years ago, the worst thing that happened to TV wrestling was the Crockett NWA take-over of the UWF. The entertaining UWF shows deteriorated drastically and became a facsimile of the dull Dusty Rhodes-produced NWA shows before being dropped.

TERESA DEMARIE: I never thought I'd list Prime Time, because two hours of bad matches isn't easy to take, but Piper really changed the chemistry of the show. His work with Heenan has been riotous. I'm even finding Monsoon tolerable as he gets less air time between the two of them. Superstars of Wrestling is how a wrestling show should move and look, it's just that the wrestling isn't very good. Portland has been an entertaining show its some bizarre angles, a few of which were tasteless and a few of which were ingenious.

BRIAN TRAMEL: All Japan has the best workers and they put out on TV every week. In a month's worth of shows, you usually will see at least one five-star match. You can't say that for any other TV show. I loved Portland this year because Len Denton has done a great job as booker with little talent. I would have ranked New Japan higher, but after the first series with the Russians, the Russian stuff became really boring.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Watching Portland tapes have forced me to re-evaluate my priorities concerning what about television wrestling most appeals to me. I had to ask myself why I liked the pre-1984 WWF so much more than the current version and why I miss with Bill Watts' UWF. I realized my personal formula for good television wrestling is a mixture of overall absurdity, frequent angles that lead to new marriages, humorous commentary and/or interviews and at least one non-squash match per show.

SCOTT HUDSON: World Championship Wrestling since its move to Center Stage has been consistent and excellent.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Almost every one of Baba's shows had an outstanding match. Some shows had two or three. I used to fast-forward through most of the All Japan matches two years ago, and rarely do that now. When the junior heavyweights are on, New Japan is as good as wrestling is ever

going to get. But that still leaves 40 so-so minutes on most weeks. Third goes to NWA Main Event. It usually has a good, sometimes very good match each week and wastes little time with lengthy interview spots.

MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. RIC FLAIR VS. RICKY STEAMBOAT
4/2 NEW ORLEANS (180) 1,204
2. Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat 5/7 Nashville (112)971
3. Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat 2/20 Chicago (110)966
4. Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk 11/15 Troy (75) 923
5. Jushin Riger vs. Naoki Sano 9/20 Osaka (52) 453

Honorable Mention: Jumbo Tsuruta vs. Genichiro Tenryu 6/5 Tokyo 425, Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk 7/23 Baltimore 229, The Foot Loose vs. Doug Furnas & Dan Kroffat 6/5 Tokyo 201, Jushin Riger vs. Naoki Sano 7/13 Tokyo 179, Bob Backlund vs. Nobuhiko Takada 12/22/88 Osaka 123, Rockers vs. Brainbusters 2/17 Hershey 99, Akira Maeda vs. Nobuhiko Takada 1/10 Tokyo 85

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 – Bob Backlund vs. Ken Patera in Madison Square Garden
1981 – Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter 4/21 Madison Square Garden
1982 – Satoru Sayama vs. Dynamite Kid 8/25 Tokyo
1983 – Ric Flair vs. Harley Race 11/24 Greensboro
1984 – Freebirds vs. Von Erichs 7/4 Fort Worth
1985 – Tiger Mask vs. Kuniaki Kobayashi 6/12 Tokyo
1986 – Ric Flair vs. Barry Windham 2/14 Orlando
1987 – Ricky Steamboat vs. Randy Savage 3/29 Pontiac
1988 – Ric Flair vs. Sting 3/27 Greensboro

VICKI LAUGHLIN: All the Riger vs. Sano matches were great, but the 9/20 match was my favorite. The Flair vs. Steamboat match from Chicago was my favorite of the series. It had everything. Japanese-style wrestling, American-style wrestling and brawling. The Nagayo vs. Asuka match on 1/29 was great. Asuka got the title she deserved. Honorable mention to Asuka vs. Jaguar Yokota. That was my favorite match of the year. It was great to see Steamboat come out of retirement after a few months, but I didn't enjoy that as much as seeing Yokota come out of retirement after 3 1/2 years. She shocked me. I didn't think she'd look half as good as she did. I'd vote it for match of the year except it only went five minutes. That I hated.

JOHN VAN VALER: The Flair vs. Steamboat match from New Orleans took a style of wrestling that many would think wouldn't work today and instead it worked great. Unlike their other matches, which were all five stars, the New Orleans match took a chance by using a different style and two out of three falls.

LANCE LEVINE: Flair vs. Steamboat from Nashville was the best of their matches because it synthesized all the best elements of their previous two matches. Factoring in Terry Funk's post-match brawl, and it's an all-time classic.

JON KARESH: I picked Flair vs. Funk from Baltimore. Clearly the technical wrestling wasn't as good as some of the Flair vs. Steamboat matches or the Riger vs. Sano matches. But as far as excitement, psychology, heat and good wrestling combined, it was the best, especially when you include the post-match brawl. I was watching with several very knowledgeable wrestling fans and during the brawl we were all on our feet jumping up and down with excitement.

ERNIE SANTILLI: The Flair-Steamboat match from Chicago lacked absolutely nothing. It should be required viewing in every wrestling school in the world. I hadn't seen

a title change match that exciting since Tiger Mask beat Kobayashi.

JOHN JANCE: Flair vs. Steamboat from New Orleans. This was a throwback to the classic Brisco vs. Funk matches which were two of three falls. Each fall told a specific story, and the skills of the two have never been showcased better. Nor have I ever seen a match that long sustain so much interest all the way through. The two best wrestlers in the United States, both in the match of their lives. How could it miss?

JOE LANCELLO: The Flair-Steamboat match from Chicago reminded me of what championship boxing matches must have been like in the old days. Incredible heat with two athletes giving their best.

STEVE YOHE: I should vote for all three Flair vs. Steamboat matches. The New Orleans match was my favorite. It's the best match I've seen in ten years and maybe the best match ever on television. I wish we could vote for 10 matches because this is the most interesting category every year.

TED KUMLANDER: Steamboat vs. Flair from New Orleans. All the matches with these two were the best matches I've ever seen. The New Orleans match was the epitome of what pro wrestling should be. Anyone who watched that match with an open mind, even if they didn't like wrestling, would have to admire the ability and conditioning of these two great athletes and they'd have to respect the sport.

TODD STUTTS: The Flair vs. Steamboat match from New Orleans was the greatest match I've ever seen and probably ever will see. I was on the edge of my seat for an hour.

JEFF BOWDREN: The group that dominated this year was the NWA. Ric Flair has been responsible for almost all of them. It started with Flair & Windham vs. Midnight Express on TBS, then Flair vs. Luger and Windham vs. Bigelow at Starrcade, Flair & Windham vs. Steamboat & Gilbert on TBS, the famous 2/20 match in Chicago, followed by New Orleans and Nashville. Then Steamboat vs. Luger in Philadelphia the night before the PPV, Flair vs. Funk at the PPV and again at Troy. The top three in Japan were Hansen & Gordy vs. Tenryu & Kawada in the finals of the tag team tournament, Tsuruta vs. Tenryu on June 5 and Riger vs. Sano on July 13. In the U.S., Flair vs. Steamboat from Nashville is my choice as the greatest match of all-time, followed by Flair vs. Steamboat from Chicago, which had the feel of a classic. Third was Flair vs. Funk from Troy because it delivered what it promised, unlike Halloween Havoc which had a cheap finish. I went with Flair vs. Steamboat from Nashville first, from Chicago second and Tenryu & Kawada vs. Hansen & Gordy from Tokyo third.

MICHAEL GENDELMAN: Flair vs. Steamboat from Chicago was the most exciting match of the year. Flair vs. Funk from Baltimore was the best brawl. Takada vs. Backlund from Osaka was the most brutal as well as exciting. There were at least seven others that should have been listed as well.

MARK MADDEN: The toughest category to limit to just three. Flair vs. Funk in Troy was a classic brawl. The amount of people who asked me if they were fighting for real was the most of any match. Flair vs. Steamboat from Chicago was an all-time classic. Hot moves, great near falls, a great story line from beginning to end. Flair vs. Steamboat in New Orleans was the greatest actual match technically. It had a physical intensity of a 15 round championship boxing match. Both men at the end looked like they were simply trying to survive. Great story line,

also, as all the falls meant something and who would have thought that Flair would give up? But Flair vs. Funk from Troy gets first. When people think that an American pro wrestling match in the year 1989 is real, that says a lot.

STEVE SCHONBERGER: Flair vs. Steamboat from New Orleans was the greatest wrestling match I've ever seen. It had every element needed to make it a truly legendary match. I can't see another match coming close to that level for a long time.

PAUL HANLIN: Flying in the face of the obvious I never got tired of watching Akira Maeda vs. Nobuhiko Takada on 1/10. For nearly 30 minutes I saw there like a complete mark, and forgot that anything about pro wrestling was a work.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The 55 1/2 minutes of Flair vs. Steamboat from New Orleans is the closest to heaven that a wrestling junkie can ever get. I have watched this masterpiece of a match many times and never fail to thrill at the total excellence displayed by both men. When the first Riger vs. Sano match was shown, I watched with complete awe. How these two guys could put so much into just 18 minutes was beyond my comprehension. The bout had everything, including a splash onto the arena floor off the top turnbuckle with a full flip thrown in for good measure, plus a dropkick off the top rope while the opponent stood on the arena floor. I watched their bout from September and it was even better. Watching these guys crawl across the ring so that they can execute another amazing high spot is almost cruel.

SCOTT HUDSON: The Flair vs. Steamboat match from Nashville was the best match in the United States this decade. It had it all, from the pre-match to the post-match. Flair vs. Steamboat from New Orleans was just as flawless. The pacing was a little slower due to the longer duration. Flair vs. Funk on 11/15 from Troy nicely capped off the best feud of the year.

CLINT FREEMAN: Flair and Steamboat had many great matches, but the one from New Orleans really stood out. Maeda vs. Takada on 1/10 did their version of a Jack Brisco vs. Dory Funk Jr. classic.

BOB CLOSSON: The Flair vs. Steamboat match from New Orleans was one of the best matches I've ever seen. I love those type of matches that build and build and this match left me wanting them to continue and continue. The two even looked like they could go on forever.

TERESA DEMARIE: Flair vs. Steamboat from Chicago was simply without equal. I've watched it over and over and there isn't a weakness to be found in the match. This is the one match of this decade, besides Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid, that every fan should have to see.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I couldn't even come up with three last year. To limit it to three this year is tragic. Flair vs. Steamboat from Chicago was magical. The heat in the last ten minutes was the best I saw all year. Everything was just so right. The wrestling. The announcing. The crowd. The interviews. The shot of Flair on his knees after having wrestled one of the great matches of his life showed what pain he should have felt. The Nashville match was every bit as good except for crowd heat. If you throw in the Funk angle, maybe it should even win but I can't consider that as part of the match. Some of the sequences in this match were flawless and the opening chop assault by both men around the ring was as physical as anything all year.

KEVIN MAFFEI: The Flair vs. Funk match from Troy was the best brawl I've ever seen.

ALEX MARVEZ: The Flair vs. Steamboat match from New Orleans was the best wrestling match I've ever seen. I set time aside for a replay because it's an event I have to see again.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| 1. DUSTIN RHODES (132) | 1,094 |
| 2. Wayne Bloom (125) | 1,071 |
| 3. Salman Hashimikov (108) | 932 |
| 4. Larry Cameron (60) | 501 |
| 5. Victor Zangiev (36) | 345 |

Honorable Mention: Mike Enos 303, Super Boy 297, Lee Scott 280, Bobby Bradley 85

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1980 - Barry Windham
- 1981 - Brad Rheingans and Brad Armstrong (tied)
- 1982 - Steve Williams
- 1983 - Road Warriors
- 1984 - Tom Zenk and Keiichi Yamada (tied)
- 1985 - Jack Victory
- 1986 - Bam Bam Bigelow
- 1987 - Brian Pillman
- 1988 - Gary Albright

BOB CLOSSON: This year's crop of rookies seems to be much better than last year's. Wayne Bloom has probably been the biggest surprise of this year. Dustin Rhodes looks like an early Dick Murdoch. I've seen the Russians and most are ho-hum but Salman Hashimikov got a push and was the best of the group.

BRIAN TRAMEL: I remember when I was told about Dustin Rhodes' debut. I hated the guy because of his father. Well, he's proven to me and a lot of other people that he's a real good worker. I've seen him in four-star matches, which is saying a lot for a rookie.

TODD STUTTS: In another federation, Wayne Bloom & Mike Enos could become stars.

SCOTT HUDSON: Dustin Rhodes, despite his lineage, can already work a good match. I just hope his daddy's work ethic never rubs off on him. For someone who had never seen a professional wrestling match eight months ago, Victor Zangiev is a great tribute to his trainers.

SMM: Salman Hashimikov was the lead in the New Japan Russian invasion. He was the star of the Tokyo Dome card which drew a record gate. He also held the IWGP version of the World title. Even though he was somewhat limited in the ring, he was still over with the fans for his legit tough reputation. Dustin Rhodes was probably the best worker of the group, but he can't top Hashimikov's impact.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Victor Zangiev was very impressive from the start. His variety of quick suplexes are wonderful to watch and he's the lone Soviet who seems to have a clue as to how to work a match. If he stays in the business, which I doubt, he could be a major talent in a year or two.

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. JIM CORNETTE (262) | 1,761 |
| 2. Bobby Heenan (109) | 1,233 |
| 3. Paul E. Dangerously (78) | 894 |
| 4. Sensational Sherri (95) | 892 |
| 5. Theodore R. Long (4) | 202 |

Honorable Mention: Scandor Akbar 102, Gary Hart 90

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Jimmy Hart
- 1984 - Jimmy Hart
- 1985 - Jim Cornette
- 1986 - Jim Cornette
- 1987 - Jim Cornette
- 1988 - Jim Cornette

CHRIS ZAVISA: This was not a banner year for managers. Jim Cornette is the best but his work was mostly as a color commentator. His managing of the Express and advising the Dudes was fairly flat, especially after Dangerously left the promotion. His turn was well done and I expect a return in 1990 of the great things Midnight and Cornette have done in the past. But his work during the first half of the year, especially against Dangerously, is enough to get him first. Like Cornette, Heenan's best work is as a color commentator. At the arena he's forgettable. His routine with Piper is enough to get him second. Dangerously was great for the first four months of the year, then became grating, almost a parody of his own character. He was out of place with the Samoans.

LANCE LEVINE: Paul E. Dangerously did a nice job on the Main Event and with the SST and Original Midnight Express. His interviews were not only funny, but the serious ones were very powerful and dramatic.

JON KARESH: Dangerously was always interesting to watch. During the time the NWA was at its low point, he was one of the few reasons to watch. I never got tired of watching him though he did get repetitive toward the end.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Of all the perennial favorites, only Bobby Heenan was consistently entertaining this year. Though they are often overlooked due to his verbal prowess, Heenan's physical mannerisms and reactions lead me to believe he could have been a big star in the era of slapstick comedy.

SMM: I have to go with loud mouth Paul E. Dangerously. Even though his year was cut short, I feel he has one of the best heel personas in the business. Sure, he's got a big mouth but the NWA made a big mistake in letting him get away.

MARK MADDEN: Cornette won this for his work during the Midnight vs. Midnight feud and for his turn on the Dudes. What was in between was merely okay, but would have been great for anyone else. Best on the mic and above average at ringside. If he stays heel next year, he should win easily. Sensational Sherri's ringside work was great, but her interviews are knitting needles being dragged across an old chalkboard. Heenan is a cliché, but he's still good. His breakups with Red Rooster and Brainbusters were hilarious.

LARRY LOVELL: I'll go with Cornette even though his best work didn't come until November. I think he did the best any manager has ever done with the no-win situation of being a babyface. Heenan was a close second for his exchanges with Piper on PTW and his inspiring departure from Wrestling Challenge.

SAM NORD: Who would have thought a year ago that an average woman wrestler and the TBS studio referee would be 1989's most entertaining managers?

SCOTT HUDSON: Sherri Martel gets more heat than anyone, including Jim Cornette. She's really good. Paul E. Dangerously had a great run in the NWA. I've enjoyed Teddy Long, Bobby Heenan and Jim Cornette, but I'm picking Ronnie P. Gossett for third. His stoic behavior as all

the heels turned on him one at a time in Memphis was hilarious.

BOB CLOSSON: It just doesn't seem right to pick Cornette this year. However, Dangerously had his shot and he was second banana to Cornette so you can't pick him either. Heenan had champions in his stable and lost them just as quick. Sherri is as hard a working manager as anyone but Cornette. Now that I look over all the names, Cornette is still the best.

TERESA DEMARIE: Sherri Martel works ringside better than anyone I can think of. Her interviews are hilariously bad, but it comes out okay. Her bride of Frankenstein look combined with her chalk on a wet blackboard voice and vampire dress style is enough to send me into throes of laughter. She works harder than the wrestlers in the WWF, and has to work in a low cut dress and stiletto heels, no less. Long is an interesting character. He's the only black in the business allowed not to act like a spasmodic.

J.Z. TRAVIS: The few times I saw Paul E. Dangerously live he got tremendous heat and worked the crowd very well. He was genuinely hated unlike so many of the heel managers.

KAREN SHEHORN: Cornette is still No. 1. He'll probably always be. His love and enthusiasm for wrestling always shows in everything he does.

TED KUMLANDER: Heenan is the best because he's always professional and is the only one who can wrestle. He takes insults because he knows his role and plays it very well. Cornette is second. His turn was great, but he can't beat Heenan when it comes to being cold and heartless.

STEVE YOHE: Sherri Martel was worth the price of admission.

BEST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

| | | |
|----|---------------------|-------|
| 1. | JIM ROSS (487) | 2,772 |
| 2. | Tony Schiavone (31) | 809 |
| 3. | Lance Russell (18) | 634 |
| 4. | Vince McMahon (14) | 399 |
| 5. | Gordon Solie (7) | 153 |

Honorable Mention: Bob Caudle 124, Don Koss 117, Chris Cruise 80

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Gordon Solie
- 1982 - Gordon Solie
- 1983 - Gordon Solie
- 1984 - Lance Russell
- 1985 - Lance Russell
- 1986 - Lance Russell
- 1987 - Lance Russell
- 1988 - Jim Ross

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Jim Ross is excellent. He really adds to a match. Bob Caudle knows his job and works very well with Ross.

STEVE YOHE: Jim Ross is the best wrestling announcer ever. Vince McMahon gets second. He can be as good or as bad as he wants to be.

KURT SCHIMMEL: Jim Ross is the best ever. He can do good comedy during squash matches and calls the big matches like a real sports announcer, using drama and a sense of history to make everything seem that much more important.

TODD STUTTS: Nobody was in Jim Ross' league, although Tony Schiavone was good. Schiavone lost a bit going to the WWF and hasn't regained his form.

JEFF BOWDREN: No one is close to Ross. He's really worked hard to improve himself this year. He's gone from being very good but occasionally shrill ("It's breaking down in Tulsa") to being consistently excellent. The best play-by-play man in the history of the wrestling business.

BOB NICHANDOWICZ: Ross is the best. He gets the angles over. He tells the story as the match evolves. The excitement he displays during PPV shows should be a course in how to announce to all other announcers.

MARK MADDEN: Jim Ross makes wrestling seem so much like a sporting event on the big shows that in many cases he adds to its believability. He was great at the big shows. He's a true pro who knows when to carry the action and when to let the action carry him. In other words, he knows the moments to keep his mouth shut, which makes him rare among today's announcers, and is interesting when he opens it, which is even rarer.

JOE LANCELLO: Not only for his own personal performance, but Jim Ross also makes his partners so much better. Watch the PPV and Clash shows and listen to Bob Caudle and Gordon Solie. Then watch them without Jim Ross on another show. The difference is astounding.

LANCE LEVINE: Ross is the one announcer who consistently offers insights that aren't obvious, recalls history and treats viewers as intelligent. I'd love to hear him call an Andre vs. Studd match just to see how good he really is.

TED KUMLANDER: Jim Ross is a lot better than anyone else because he can take a dead match and make you believe you are watching something important. I've noticed he will admit it when a match isn't good and will point out genuine weaknesses in wrestlers as well as genuine strengths. Tony Schiavone is very good but he doesn't possess Ross' timing or sense of irony or historical memory.

KAREN SHEHORN: In this category there should only be a first place vote. Jim Ross is so far above everyone else that this award should just be called the Jim Ross Award.

TERESA DEMARIE: Schiavone came into his own this year. He was overwhelmed by Ross last year, but is easier on the ears than Ross. Schiavone can work well with both Ventura and Monsoon. Ross can be the best, but sometimes he lets his enthusiasm interfere with his work. Lee Marshall had a great voice and he's a good announcer but he lets the front office make a mockery out of his work.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Please rename this the Jim Ross award, or else just eliminate the category because Ross is in a league all by himself. His insight and knowledge provide every match with something of interest even if the wrestling itself is lacking. He makes every match enjoyable with his announcing savvy. Ross is so good he could take the Ultimate Warrior vs. Andre the Giant and make it seem like a good match. Even Tony Schiavone's great announcing

couldn't overcome his trip to the WWF. His lies got so prevalent and annoying that you wondered when the wood splinters would come off his ever-growing nose.

SCOTT HUDSON: Jim Ross makes great matches seem even better with his commentary. The Flair vs. Funk match in Baltimore is a prime example. Vince McMahon gets his characters and gimmicks over better than anyone and his disdain for the heels is balanced by Jesse Ventura's disdain for the faces. Tony Schiavone has done well in the WWF but he's not as good as he once was.

STEVE SIMS: Ross gets first because he actually calls wrestling like a real sporting event with history, etc. on the big shows. Caudle is a reliable old pro who makes sure he never talks down to the fans. McMahon gets third because he gets his key points over effectively.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Ross is so good that he makes every other announcer look bad in comparison. His calling of the three Flair vs. Steamboat matches rank among the best of all-time. With all the talent lost by the NWA over the past two years, it is a real relief to hear that Ross has signed a long-term contract.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Ross is superb and nobody can touch him.

But I expect Chris Cruise to break into the top three next year.

MIKE LYON: Jim Ross is knowledgeable, stays somewhat unbiased and tells you just about everything except the outcome of the match.

WORST TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

| | | |
|----|------------------------|-------|
| 1. | ED WHALEN (296) | 1,761 |
| 2. | Hillbilly Jim (80) | 723 |
| 3. | Gorilla Monsoon (64) | 623 |
| 4. | Lord Alfred Hayes (48) | 565 |
| 5. | Vince McMahon (57) | 383 |

Honorable Mention: Mark Lowrance 297, Bulldog Bob Brown 229, Frank Dusek 200, Tim Dix 97

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Angelo Mosca
1985 - Gorilla Monsoon
1986 - David Crockett
1987 - David Crockett
1988 - David Crockett

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Vince McMahon comes off like an arrogant jerk and acts like everyone watching has a brain made out of mush.

JEFF BOWDREN: No matter what I've ever said about Monsoon the buffoon, Bill "Norwegia" Mercer and David "The Birth Control Child" Crockett, it can never be said that any of these men would ever deliberately refuse to show an angle on TV. Ed Whalen has some control over everyone in Calgary and the promotion will always be considered small-time as long as he's the announcer.



Jim Ross

MIKE WOOD: Before I heard Hillbilly Jim, I thought this should be named the David Crockett Award. Now I think it should be called the Hillbilly Crockett Award.

STEVE SIMS: Ed Whalen is far and away the worst. The fact he got away with sabotaging the key angle of the whole year in Stampede wins this award for him for the year and for the decade.

SCOTT HUDSON: Charlie Platt of the now-defunct CWF couldn't call a one-horse race without getting the horse's name wrong at least five times. Tim Dix of Southern Championship Wrestling doesn't make that mistake, but it's the only one he doesn't make.

JOHN JANCE: Picking Gordon Solie for this has been a habit for years. He's obnoxious, full of himself and repeats the most ridiculous cliches to death. He's great the first time you hear him and he has a great reputation, but there is so little substance to his announcing. "He's so quick, he's sudden," is a great line, but not when it is used for people like Pedro Morales or Buggy McGraw.

JOE LANCELLO: Mark Lowrance's refusal to acknowledge his color man, no matter how bad his color man may be, is as disgusting as his commentary.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Mark Lowrance wouldn't know the difference between a full nelson and Rikki Nelson.

TERESA DEMARIE: Gorilla Monsoon has been bad for years, but at least Schiavone tempers him out a bit. I wish he'd stick a fork in himself a few times and become a fountain of misinformation literally. Ed Whalen is simply a booby that escaped from the hatch. No doubt because they didn't follow his batten-down advice.

J.Z. TRAVIS: There is nobody to compare with Ed Whalen. Cutting off matches, pulling the mic on interviews and totally brainless announcing. But the worst is pushing himself as the lead babyface. If there's a malfunction in any junction, it's in Ed's brain.

CATEGORY B -- WINNERS JUDGED BY MOST FIRST PLACE VOTES

BEST MAJOR WRESTLING CARD

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1.NWA BALTIMORE BASH 7/23 | 168 |
| 2.NWA Nashville Wrestle War 5/7 | 145 |
| 3.AJPW Tokyo Budokan Hall 6/5 | 105 |
| 4.NWA New York Knockout 11/1 | 574 |
| 5.NWA Chitown Rumble 2/20 | 37 |

Honorable Mention: NWA Starrcade '88 Norfolk 12/26/88 21, UWF Osaka Baseball Stadium 5/4 20, NWA Ragin Cajun Clash 4/2 New Orleans 8

NEW CATEGORY

PAUL HANLIN: The Music City Showdown (Wrestle War). It marked a crossroads for the NWA. The end of one great feud and the beginning of another. Chitown Rumble, just for the main event gets second.

MARK MADDEN: There were cards with better individual matches, but none as strong from top-to-bottom as the Baltimore Bash. It had a great brawl (Flair vs. Funk), a great post-match brawl, a great gimmick match (War Games), a super wrestling match (Luger vs. Steamboat) and even a decent Battle Royal. The only bad thing was the finish of Sting vs. Muta.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: The Baltimore Bash. Nashville would be a close second but everything in the last four matches in Baltimore was exceptional. This, along with two legitimate match of the year candidates, Steamboat vs. Luger and Flair vs. Funk and a violent War Games showcased wrestling in North America at its best. The best hour of wrestling was the last hour of New York Knockout. The best booking I've seen.

SCOTT HUDSON: The Music City Showdown (Wrestle War) from top-to-bottom was the best card of the past few years. Even the one no-show (Junkfood Dog) allowed Muta to have a great squash match and actually improved the card. Flair vs. Steamboat and the ensuing angle with Funk was a perfect main event for a nearly perfect card. In the lobby of the Sheraton before the card both Joe Pedicino and Ric Flair told me that if we "didn't like this show, we would never like an NWA show." Boy, were they right.

STEVE SIMS: The June 5 All-Japan card at Tokyo's Budokan Hall had three matches I'll be saving for a long time--Tsuruta vs. Tenryu, Sting vs. Dan Spivey and The Foot Loose vs. The Can Am Express. The work rate on this show was as good as any card I've ever seen. The intensity was phenomenal. Very close behind was the Music City Showdown, although I don't think the wrestling aside from the Flair vs. Steamboat match hit the level of the All Japan card.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Baltimore Bash was the best PPV show of all-time and the best overall card of the year.

MIKE OMANSKY: Summer Slam had high visibility and was an excellent show that drew big money. On its best day, the NWA couldn't pull this off.

WORST MAJOR WRESTLING CARD

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. WWF WRESTLEMANIA V 4/2 ATLANTIC CITY | 285 |
| 2. WWF Survivor Series 11/23 Chicago | 80 |
| 3. WWF Summer Slam 8/28 Meadowlands | 62 |
| 4. AWA Superclash III 12/13/88 Chicago | 57 |
| 5. NWA Halloween Havoc 10/28 Philadelphia | 26 |

Honorable Mention: WWF Royal Rumble 1/15 Houston 14

NEW CATEGORY

MIKE OMANSKY: Wrestlemania's hype so much surpassed its wrestling. On its worst day, even the day they had the Ding Dongs, the NWA couldn't pull something this bad off either.

MARK MADDEN: Although I liked the post-card fight between Verne Gagne and Jerry Jarrett, that was the only thing resembling a good match that had anything to do with Superclash III

SMM: Summer Slam and Survivors come to mind but I was more annoyed by Survivors since in 1988, the show was really good and this year it was nothing.

STEVE GENNARELLI: Take the two worst Saturday Night Main Events ever, take out the commercials and the content will still surpass the third Survivors Series. A complete embarrassment of a major card.

JON KARESH: Wrestlemania V. It had a horribly booked main event finish. Add to this the stupid decision to hold it in Trump's Tomb, the shockingly bad Piper/Downey skit and some of the matches on the card and you have one lousy afternoon. Titan can really hype a big card, but it often has trouble delivering the product.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Let's see, we had Morton Downey and Roddy Piper in the infamous blowing smoke up the ass routine. We had Run DMC doing God-only-knows what. We had the worst matches of the year to boot. But this is the WWF and we don't turn it on to see wrestling anyway.

STEVE SIMS: Survivor Series bored me to death. Nothing at all happened. At least there were two title changes at Wrestlemania and one other decent match although there were some incredibly boring stinkers. Halloween Havoc gets third because it never should have taken place and it showed. The gimmick main event failed when the gimmick failed.

SCOTT HUDSON: Superclash III in Chicago. Kerry Von Erich is such an idiot that he can't even use a blade without making himself look like a fool. This pretty well destroyed the AWA and dropped them to the level of the CWA and USWA.

BOB CLOSSON: The recent Survivor Series is the only PPV event where I really wished I could have gotten my money back.

TERESA DEMARIE: Wrestlemania V didn't really have a good match on the card and I had to endure watching Piper struggle through an excruciating skit due to a dead audience, bad timing and a lousy guest.

MIKE WOOD: I guess I'll end up trying to endure another Wrestlemania in 1990. How else can I find selections for Worst match of the year, Worst skit of all-time, Biggest waste of my money, etc. Wrestlemania is a faster killer to a video party than the VCR blowing up.

JEFF MULLINS: Survivor Series almost made me want to give up wrestling for something more exciting and interesting like stamp collecting.

BEST WRESTLING MOVE

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | SCOTT STEINER FRANKENSTEINER | 280 |
| 2. | Great Muta moonsault | 111 |
| 3. | Jushin Riger somersault splash | 26 |
| 4. | Hulk Hogan superplex off cage | 23 |
| 5. | Scott Steiner blockbuster suplex | 14 |

Honorable Mention: Brian Pillman "Air Pillman" 12, Jushin Riger suplex out of ring 12

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1982 - Super Destroyer (Scott Irwin)'s superplex
- 1983 - Jimmy Snuka's Superfly splash
- 1984 - Davey Boy Smith's power clean in combination with Dynamite Kid's dropkick off the top ropes
- 1985 - Tiger Mask's dive, with a mid-air flip, outside the ring
- 1986 - Chavo Guerrero's back flip flying body press
- 1987 - Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press
- 1988 - Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press

BOB CLOSSON: Thank God is has a name now. I just love the Frankenstein. I'm also glad people help sell it as well as they do because we've seen how silly it looks when it isn't sold right.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Scott Steiner's Frankenstein is so impressive because of his size and his quickness. It almost looks like it comes out of nowhere.

SMM: I loved Dan Kroffat's Kroffat-bomb. Cactus Jack Manson's elbow drop to the floor is crazy. I guess he wants one of those Superstar Graham hip operations down the road. Jushin Riger and Naoki Sano have moves to win this category in every match, but nobody has names for those moves yet. But I have to go with Akira Nogami's dive into the guard rail. He should get a medal, or maybe a psychological exam for that one.

DAVID HANNAH: Super Boy's rope walk. It's better than Keiichi Yamada's shooting star press. Comparing Super Boy's rope walk to Owen Hart's is like comparing Owen Hart's to Marty Janetty's. Janetty does a half rope walk, Hart does a rope walk and Super Boy does a double rope walk.

HARDEST WORKER

| | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|
| 1. | TERRY FUNK | 250 |
| 2. | Ric Flair | 238 |
| 3. | Jushin Riger | 48 |
| 4. | Ricky Steamboat | 27 |
| 5. | Ted DiBiase | 11 |

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1983 - Dynamite Kid
- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Ric Flair
- 1986 - Ric Flair
- 1987 - Ric Flair
- 1988 - Ric Flair

CHRIS ZAVISA: Riger and Sano work harder in 15 minutes against each other than anyone else. However, Flair works as a consistently high level against everyone and does it night after night, often in much longer matches.

MARK MADDEN: Dusty Rhodes, Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior and their overrated ilk have never worked as hard on any night in their careers as Funk did every night in 1989. He's 45, but he had no regard for that or for himself.

KURT SCHIMMEL: Funk was on his own level this year. I can't see how he did it. He was doing it when I was 12-years-old and he's still doing it nearly 20 years later.

JOHN JANCE: Ric Flair for performing at such a high level nightly despite the additional pressure of booking.

DAVID HANNAH: After getting legitimately knocked out in his 7/15 match with Jushin Riger, Naoki Sano put on an unbelievable performance. He did a dive over the top rope and smashes his face on the floor and came up bloody. Then he did a dropkick off the top rope to the floor.

ANTHONY AMARA: Rick Rude was the only wrestler this year who could simultaneously wrestle and perform CPR.

SCOTT HUDSON: Ric Flair had the greatest year of his career in 1989. It is awfully hard not to pick Terry Funk or Ricky Steamboat, but neither worked the entire year.

JOHN MCADAM: Twice this year I saw Rick Steamboat wrestle in front of less than 1,000 people and both times he had four-star matches.

RICH KERIN: Ric Flair seemed to have the award locked up until Terry Funk came on the scene. Funk abused his body night-after-night and gave the fans exciting matches to watch. His Hall of Fame match was one of the greatest

gimmick matches I've ever seen due to his great work the use of the house mic. He left a great impression on the minds of many.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Terry Funk. First, his body was in worse shape to begin with than Ric Flair's and he didn't let it get in the way. Two, he sold like crazy for Flair and paid the physical price.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Jushin Riger looked great no matter who he was in the ring against.

BIGGEST SHOCK OF THE YEAR

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. DUSTY RHODES GOES TO WWF | 143 |
| 2. Jose Gonzales babyface push | 97 |
| 3. New Japan debuts Soviets | 39 |
| 4. Rick Steamboat not resigned by NWA | 38 |
| 5. Blanchard & Anderson quit WWF | 37 |

Honorable Mention: Antonio Inoki elected to parliament 17, Zeus does job for Hogan at Summer Slam 16, Jim Cornette turns on Dynamic Dudes 15, Ricky Steamboat returns to NWA 10, Verne Gagne's comments on Bruiser Brody 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Tommy Rich winning NWA title
- 1982 - Otto Wanz winning AWA title
- 1983 - Harley Race winning NWA title
- 1984 - Death of David Von Erich
- 1985 - WWF getting on network television
- 1986 - Magnum T.A.'s automobile accident
- 1987 - Jim Crockett purchases UWF
- 1988 - Death of Bruiser Brody

JEFF MULLINS: Dusty Rhodes shows up in the WWF, gets a big push and gets over so well it blew my mind.

MARK MADDEN: Why would respected Olympic athletes from the Soviet Union sign to become pro wrestlers? The same reason acrobats go to the circus and figure skaters sign with the Ice Capades--money. But still, I never thought this one would really happen. As it turned out, the initial shock belied some horrific hype followed by a lot of mediocre-to-bad matches.

ANTHONY AMARA: The biggest shock was the NWA not resigning Steamboat after he had just delivered the best series of matches in years. The next biggest shock was Inoki's election to parliament. Does this mean we'll have to vote for the Hogan/Beefcake ticket in '92?

JEFF BOWDREN: While Jose Gonzales getting acquitted was sickening, I can't say it was a shock. Dusty Rhodes showing up in Titan was a shock. Not so much that he would go, but that Vince would take him. Special consideration must be given to Kevin Von Erich, who recently spoke a coherent sentence during an interview.

JOHN MCADAM: I was genuinely depressed for a week when Steamboat left the NWA.

STEVE SIMS: I couldn't believe the NWA let the single most proficient actual wrestler they had walk away after six months after they had already agreed to a contract verbally.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Ricky Steamboat was the biggest WWF name to enter the NWA. He gave his all for his matches with Flair. When that was done, he did a great job in getting Luger over. What was his reward for all this? Turner and Herd let him get away after agreeing on a figure. This is the same company that spent \$12 million on a second-rate slow

forward who made a marginal contribution coming off the bench. Instead of John Concak getting the big contract, it should have been Steamboat. You can't pretend to be a major player when you allow your top talent to go elsewhere. It was at that point when I realized the NWA had no plans for overtaking the WWF. They couldn't even properly play the cards they already had.

MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. JOSE GONZALES BABYFACE PUSH | 373 |
| 2. Toni Adams spanking | 62 |
| Dusty Rhodes toilet bowl skit | 62 |
| 4. Hulk Hogan manhandling Sensational Sherri | 34 |
| 5. DeBeers-Dukes painting angle | 33 |

Honorable Mention: Verne Gagne's remarks on Bruiser Brody 23, Terry Funk/Ric Flair plastic bag angle 20, Angles involving Carl Styles glass eye 12, World Wrestling Council selling Bruiser Brody videotape 12, Eric Embry vomits in ring 11, Angles attacking cripples in Portland 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1981 - Usage of "The Monster" and saying he was built in a laboratory in Transylvania by LeBelle promotion
- 1982 - Bob Backlund as WWF champion
- 1983 - Pretending Eddie Gilbert had re-injured his neck after original injury took place in auto accident by WWF
- 1984 - Blackjack Mulligan faking heart attack in Florida by Championship Wrestling from Florida
- 1985 - Usage of Mike Von Erich's near fatal illness to sell Cotton Bowl tickets by World Class
- 1986 - Equating an angle of Chris Adams' blindness with the death of Gino Hernandez by World Class
- 1987 - World Class handling of Mike Von Erich's death
- 1988 - Fritz Von Erich's brush with death

STEVE GENNARELLI: 1989 saw wrestling hit a new low with its portrayal of blacks. Zeus, Virgil, Doom, The Dukes-DeBeers gimmick and these were just with the promotions with national exposure.

MARK MADDEN: Whether he was declared guilty in a court of law is irrelevant, Carlos Colon was there. He saw Bruiser Brody's life spill onto a locker room floor. Then he ignored it all and brought the guy back and played up his innocence as a gimmick. If there is a heaven and hell, Carlos Colon will know shortly following his death.

LARRY LOVELL: No bad taste brainstorm of any promotion could top the real life poor taste of Jose Gonzales acting out the role of a babyface in Puerto Rico. The whole promotion is at fault for participation in the whitewashing of Brody's senseless death. There is a segment of Puerto Rican fans who protest Gonzales' actions. I just with the American wrestlers who have continued to appear there would have felt the same way.

CHRIS ZAVISA: When Jose Gonzales was acquitted, it didn't surprise me. When he returned as a babyface star, that really didn't shock me, either. I expected both and wasn't disappointed with the outright injustice of it all. Seeing Verne Gagne say in print that Frank Goodish got what he deserved was one of the lowest things in wrestling history. Verne is a very sick man.

STEVE SIMS: I think fiddling with Carl Styles' fake eye is disgusting, tasteless and cheap. And those are the best things I can say about it. Both the Toni Adams angles and the various WWF abuse women angles disgust me as they pander to the absolute lowest level of fan.

RICH KERIN: Jose Gonzales and Carlos Colon deserve a whole lot worse than just the Most Disgusting Promotional Tactic award.

GARY CAHALL: Chris Adams allowing his wife to be spanked on TV is up there, as is the Rhodes plumber skit, but my pick goes to Billy Jack Haynes for allowing his blind father to be used for cheap heat.

ROBERT SILBER: The paint matches with Dukes vs. DeBeers were in extremely bad taste, but in a roundabout way, you could excuse them since the evil racist does get it in the end. However, by actively swaying public opinion in Jose Gonzales' favor during his trial and bringing him back as a hero, the WWC has committed a crime against human decency.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Jose the hero was nauseating, but not much of a surprise as it followed the great wrestling tradition of exploiting personal tragedy for commercial gain. In that way, it was a "natural" angle. Because some twisted soul actually believed the DeBeers vs. Dukes paint matches would sell tickets and that people would enjoy this angle gives it my vote. The repugnant racist scam may very well have worked in the sixties.....that is, the 1860s.

SCOTT HUDSON: Jose Gonzales' babyface return following his acquittal in the murder of Bruiser Brody. This scum got stroked by Carlos Colon so much as a hero that he actually started bragging about his innocence. Nothing in this business has ever gotten me any madder than this.

JOHN MCADAM: If Chris Adams wants to watch other men give his wife bare-bottom spankings and tear open her blouse, he should have them do it at the No-tell motel. Both Toni Adams angles reeked of sexual assault and I'm surprised even the USWA would allow them.

ALEX MARVEZ: Eric Embry puking his guts out after being hit with a baseball bat.

JEFF MULLINS: The abuse of women by almost all of the promotions is disgusting. Male violence toward women in our society is a daily, tragic occurrence. It is here that some of the "great" minds in wrestling have gone too far.

BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. JESSE VENTURA | 310 |
| 2. Jim Cornette | 181 |
| 3. Scotty the Body | 74 |
| 4. Paul E. Dangerously | 14 |
| 5. Michael Hayes | 13 |

Honorable Mention: Terry Funk 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1986 - Michael Hayes
1987 - Jesse Ventura
1988 - Jesse Ventura

TERESA DEMARIE: Jesse Ventura, as well as the most colorful. Tremendous voice, bizarre appearance, good wit and the ability to appear as credible while spewing the most ridiculous WWF swill will keep him as the favorite here for a long time to come.

ANTHONY AMARA: The quote of the year came from Michael Hayes when Jim Ross told him that Missy Hyatt was a lady, not a broad. "Jim Ross, my mother is a lady. The rest of them are broads."

JON KARESH: This is very close between Cornette and Ventura. Ventura does an excellent job, but is somewhat repetitive. I think next year's winner will be Kevin Sullivan. He does an excellent job in getting the wrestling angles over without pushing his own personality and issues at the expense of everyone else.

JOHN JANCE: Jesse Ventura has been coasting lately, but Cornette is amazing to just keep up with.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: What used to be Ventura's award is no more. Jim Cornette has taken over and he only needed half the year to do it. Cornette is quicker and wittier and he fed off Jim Ross' lines like they had worked together for years.

SCOTT HUDSON: Nobody has come close to Ventura. The NWA seems to be trying in vain to copy the success of Titan's TV product as they try one announcer after the other to fill the spot of the flamboyant heel. Unfortunately, they have nobody close.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Ventura has been supplanted by Cornette. Putting Cornette in front of the mic for one and two hours at a stretch was the best out of the ring move the NWA has done all year.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Scotty the Body is so much fun to listen to. There's no comparing him with Ventura. Ventura was boring and dry in comparison.

STRONGEST WRESTLER

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. STEVE WILLIAMS | 440 |
| 2. Rick Steiner | 37 |
| 3. Road Warrior Animal | 12 |
| Doug Furnas | 12 |
| 5. Scott Steiner | 6 |
| Davey Boy Smith | 6 |

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1981 - Tony Atlas
1982 - Ken Patera
1983 - Hulk Hogan
1984 - Butch Reed
1985 - Road Warrior Animal
1986 - Road Warrior Animal
1987 - Steve Williams
1988 - Steve Williams

GABRIEL DAIGLE: How can anyone dispute the physical evidence Dr. Death gave us. He pressed Terry Gordy eight times in succession during the War Games.

MARK MADDEN: I'm glad he pressed Terry Gordy all those times so we can retire the award to Steve Williams.

BOB CLOSSON: I never really believed Steve Williams was the strongest until I saw how easy he pressed Terry Gordy during the War Games.

READERS' FAVORITE WRESTLER

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| 1. RIC FLAIR | 236 |
| 2. Terry Funk | 93 |
| 3. Jushin Riger | 80 |
| 4. Akira Maeda | 31 |
| 5. Roddy Piper | 25 |

Honorable Mention: Great Muta 24, Mr. Perfect 23, Owen Hart 17, Ricky Steamboat 13, Nobuhiko Takada 13, Scott Steiner 10, Lex Luger 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Ric Flair
- 1985 - Ric Flair
- 1986 - Ric Flair
- 1987 - Ric Flair
- 1988 - Ric Flair

READERS' MOST HATED WRESTLER

- | | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 1. | ULTIMATE WARRIOR | 117 |
| 2. | Dusty Rhodes | 107 |
| 3. | Hulk Hogan | 77 |
| 4. | Jose Gonzales | 73 |
| 5. | Jim Duggan | 46 |

Honorable Mention: Dino Bravo 22, Eric Embry 19, Andre the Giant 18, Brutus Beefcake 15, Akira Maeda 13, Greg Gagne 12

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Ivan Putski
- 1985 - Hulk Hogan
- 1986 - Hulk Hogan
- 1987 - Dusty Rhodes
- 1988 - Dusty Rhodes

WORST WRESTLER

- | | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 1. | ANDRE THE GIANT | 249 |
| 2. | Ultimate Warrior | 119 |
| 3. | Jim Duggan | 30 |
| 4. | Junkyard Dog | 25 |
| 5. | Dino Bravo | 20 |

Honorable Mention: Sid Vicious 16, Hillbilly Jim 15, Dusty Rhodes 12

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Ivan Putski
- 1985 - Uncle Elmer (Stan Frazier)
- 1986 - Mike Von Erich
- 1987 - Junkfood Dog
- 1988 - Anabolic Warrior

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Anabolic Warrior is terrible and hasn't gotten any better, but the worst is Sid Vicious. At least Hellwig hasn't hurt as many people due to his own incompetence.

MARK MADDEN: It's hard to hate Andre the Giant, because it's not his fault he's become what he's become. But nobody can carry him to a good match. He can't move. His strength is gone. But I don't want to see him retire, either. I have a feeling he'd just die without wrestling. He'd have no reason to live and I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

JEFF BOWDREN: The Ultimate Warrior and Sid Vicious are both awful, but Vicious has that borderline sicko psychotic look about him that makes him entertaining. Warrior has the stamina of a cardiology patient after a pack of cigarettes and in four years has learned almost nothing.

JOHN JANCE: Dino "No heat" Bravo. A great testament to his status is how the crowd sits in total silence watching his well-executed wrestling moves, great ring psychology and awesome power displays. His great interviews gets the fans up for the matches. People don't even care enough about him to even boo.

JOHN MCADAM: It's torture to watch a fat, lead-footed idiot like Jim Duggan clown and stall his way through a 20 minute match for retarded fans.

BOB CLOSSON: I really don't think a wrestler can look any worse than Andre the Giant did in 1989.

WORST TAG TEAM

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. | POWERS OF PAIN | 190 |
| 2. | Bushwackers | 86 |
| 3. | Andre & Haku | 69 |
| 4. | Ding Dongs | 42 |
| 5. | Slaughter & Von Raschke | 39 |

Honorable Mention: Giant Baba & Rusher Kimura 25, Bolsheviks 21, New Zealand Militia 16

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - The Crusher & Baron Von Raschke
- 1985 - Uncle Elmer & Cousin Junior
- 1986 - Junkfood Dog & George Steele
- 1987 - Jimmy Valiant & Bugsy McGraw
- 1988 - Bolsheviks

GABRIEL DAIGLE: All they needed was one night. The Ding Dongs sealed it on June 14.

RICH KERIN: Once again another large team with very little talent, and the Barbarian has all of the very little talent. The Powers of Pain have gone downhill fast since joining the WWF, and they didn't have very far to fall.

ERNIE SANTILLI: The Powers of Pain were originally hired by Titan primarily because they look like the Road Warriors. They still do. But only in still pictures.

MARK MADDEN: It turns out that the best thing the Powers of Pain had going for them was Paul Jones, and he was terrible.

WORST TELEVISION SHOW

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | ICW WRESTLING | 188 |
| 2. | AWA on ESPN | 184 |
| 3. | USWA Challenge | 49 |
| 4. | WWF All American | 37 |
| 5. | Southern Championship | 29 |

Honorable Mention: WWF Bobby Heenan Show 21, Pro Wrestling Plus 17, NWA World Championship Wrestling 16, Stampede Wrestling 13, Atlantic Coast Wrestling 13, Chicago Championship Wrestling 9, WWF Prime Time Wrestling 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - WWF All-Star Wrestling
- 1985 - Championship Wrestling from Florida
- 1986 - California Championship Wrestling
- 1987 - World Class Championship Wrestling
- 1988 - AWA on ESPN

RICH KERIN: From horrible lighting to terrible announcing to an even worse work rate, the ICW has to be seen to be believed.

MARK MADDEN: The AWA show is so bad that I look forward to when it gets preempted. Larry Zbyszko's interviews are okay so I root for one in the first 30 seconds of the show so I can switch to Roller Games.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: The AWA reigns supreme again. No good matches. No good interviews. The only saving grace is Nick Bockwinkel who should just lace up the boots so we could at least see something, although Verne doesn't deserve any better.

JOHN MCADAM: I'd have voted for Prime Time Wrestling but the commercials for the Women's Secret Confession Hotline on the USA network were more entertaining than anything I saw on the AWA all year.

CHRIS ZAVISA: The Bobby Heenan rip-off of the old Fernwood 2-Night parody was beyond bad. Thank goodness the network pulled the plug on it after only one month.

WORST MANAGER

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. MR. FUJI | 268 |
| 2. Gary Hart | 42 |
| Sir Oliver Humperdink | 42 |
| 4. Samuel F. Kent | 29 |
| 5. Percy Pringle | 25 |
| Abdul Wizar | 25 |

Honorable Mention: Tojo Yamamoto 23, Hiro Matsuda 22, Elizabeth 17, Paul Ellering 15, Ox Baker 15, Woman 14, Jimmy Hart 14, Slick 9, Nate the Rat 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Mr. Fuji
1985 - Mr. Fuji
1986 - Paul Jones
1987 - Mr. Fuji
1988 - Mr. Fuji

STEVE GENNARELLI: In native tongue, Big Kahuna means "Albano-clone." That's why Humperdink gets it, for mocking the natives.

MARK MADDEN: Remember when Percy Pringle was supposed to be English? Now he has a Texas accent. Doesn't matter, because he's hideous either way.

JOHN JANCE: Was there ever a reason to have Hiro Matsuda? Why is there a non-speaking manager for one of the best talkers in the history of the business? Did he ever say anything? Did he appear menacing? Did anyone care? Do you remember the name of the corporation? Do you remember which Flair-Steamboat match he was at ringside during and which one he wasn't? Can the NWA be more xenophobic? Where did he go? Why did he leave?

JON KARESH: Doesn't anyone know that World War II was over 45 years ago? Don't you think Mr. Fuji could at least give up the gig of being a sinister Japanese?

BOB NICHANDOWICZ: While the Best Brawler category has been renamed in honor of Bruiser Brody, this should be renamed in honor of Fuj the Stoooge.

KURT SCHIMMEL: Tojo Yamamoto is so bad that all you can do is laugh.

LARRY LOVELL: Seeing Woman manage is comparable to watching Mamie Van Doren act in her heyday.

RICH KERIN: No manager does less for his team that the sumo-looking Mr. Fuji. His lack of personality and poor ringside work make him a non-entity. Vince should drop him and hire Paul E. Dangerously. At least Paul E. knows the job description for a manager.

TERESA DEMARIE: Can't give it to Fuji. He almost disappeared. How about Miss Elizabeth. She does nothing but stand there with her hand over her mouth in a pitifully bad pantomime of concern. Her performance, or lack thereof in a Brother Love segment that brought out the worst Madison Square Garden crowd of the decade clinched it for her.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Simply because of how much he's pushed, Gary Hart. He's not that bad, but he's been shoved down our throats since Muta came in and this J-Tex thing has only brought him more camera time as well as detracting from Terry Funk. He's just not worth the time.

SCOTT HUDSON: If you look up the definition of the word "useless" in the dictionary, they'll have a picture of Tojo Yamamoto. I thought the whole idea of having a manager was to provide a wrestler who couldn't talk with a mouth-piece. Tojo was not only the worst manager but also the worst interview in the USWA. I fail to see any logic in this.

WORST MATCH OF THE YEAR

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. ANDRE THE GIANT VS. ULTIMATE WARRIOR | |
| 10/31 TOPEKA SNME | 111 |
| 2. Ding Dongs debut vs. George South & Cougar Jay | |
| 6/14 Fort Bragg | 60 |
| 3. Andre the Giant vs. Jake Roberts | 4/2 Atlantic City 57 |
| 4. Paul Jones vs. Ivan Koloff | 12/7/88 Chattanooga 49 |
| 5. Dusty Rhodes vs. Honkeytonk Man | |
| 8/28 Meadowlands | 41 |

Honorable Mention: Rougeaus vs. Bushwackers 4/2 Atlantic City 31, Scott Hall vs. Sid Vicious TBS 31, POWW Lingerie Battle Royal 12/13/88 Chicago 21, Tommy Rich vs. Cuban Assassin 10/28 Philadelphia 18, Hulk Hogan vs. The Genius 10/31 Topeka SNME 12, Andre the Giant vs. Ultimate Warrior 9/30 MSG 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1984 - Fabulous Moolah vs. Wendi Richter from Madison Square Garden
1985 - Fred Blassie vs. Lou Albano from Nassau Coliseum
1986 - Roddy Piper vs. Mr. T boxing match from Nassau Coliseum
1987 - Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant 3/29 Pontiac
1988 - Hiroshi Wajima vs. Tom Magee 4/21 Kawasaki

ALEX MARVEZ: Paul Jones vs. Ivan Koloff at the Clash. If more people would have seen the Bill Francis vs. Nord the Barbarian football match, it would have won. But the Jones-Koloff match was an unfortunate goodbye for a once-great wrestler.

MARK MADDEN: Dusty Rhodes vs. Honkeytonk Man from Summer Slam. They came. They saw. The conquered new bounds on wrestling hideousness. The sad part is, both guys were doing their best.

JEFF BOWDREN: Hey, Verne. Let's get back to the basics of pro wrestling on our PPV. I know what we can do to show the public that we're trying to promote real wrestling, not that WWF garbage. Let's promote a lingerie Battle Royal.

SMM: The Ding Dongs match from the Clash. I can't even remember who they were wrestling. It doesn't really matter. It wasn't the worst match from a work rate standard, but the idea really made me sick. During this match I was wondering why I was even a wrestling fan. Then I came to my senses and realized that the guy (Jim Herd) who thought this up isn't a wrestling fan. The real Ding Dong was the guy who hired him.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: The Ultimate Warrior vs. Andre the Giant from the Saturday Night Main Event. A friend of mine and I were having lunch one day and I came up with the ultimate WWF match. The worst match there ever could be. Of course it had to be Andre vs. Anabolic. I worked out all the spots. Warrior runs to the ring and he's so blown up so Andre walks to the ring, which takes five minutes, giving Warrior time to catch his breath. It was so funny. Andre chokes while holding onto the ropes so he doesn't fall down. Warrior breaks free, does a clothesline, Andre ties himself up in the ropes so he can sit down. What a great joke. Then I saw the match. Well, it was a great joke until I actually had to watch it.

STEVE SIMS: I almost fell asleep during a lot of the matches at Wrestlemania, but Bushwackers vs. Rougeaus and Andre vs. Jake Roberts were the worst.

WORST FEUD

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. ANDRE VS. WARRIOR | 219 |
| 2. Andre vs. John Studd | 139 |
| 3. Garvin vs. Valentine | 30 |
| 4. Rooster vs. Brawler | 18 |
| Luger vs. Rich | 18 |
| Dukes vs. DeBeers | 18 |

Honorable Mention: Hogan vs. Zeus 14, Andre vs. Roberts 13, Embry vs. Akbar 11, Snuka vs. Honkeytonk Man 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Andre the Giant vs. John Studd
- 1985 - Sgt. Slaughter vs. Boris Zhukov
- 1986 - Machines vs. King Kong Bundy & John Studd
- 1987 - George Steele vs. Danny Davis
- 1988 - Midnight Rider vs. Tully Blanchard

RICH KERIN: Nobody cared about Jim Duggan vs. Dino Bravo. No heat or ability between the two of them. This sent a lot of fans to the bathroom.

TODD STUTTS: Lex Luger vs. Tommy Rich. Nobody cared about Tommy Rich.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: Andre the Giant vs. Ultimate Warrior. Terrible matches. Terrible interviews. Terrible excuses for athletes.

JOHN JANCE: Andre the Giant vs. Anabolic Warrior. Two wrestlers who have absolutely no business in this business. Especially working with each other. If the match isn't over in the blink of an eye, one can sit in morbid fascination watching to see which of these superb athletes will keel over first. Neither can do an interview, either. Ultimate Warrior + Ultimate Giant = Ultimate shit.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Anabolic Warrior vs. Andre the Giant. The only heat in this feud was the friction between Andre's legs when he stumbled into the ring. I was embarrassed.

WORST ON INTERVIEWS

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| 1. ULTIMATE WARRIOR | 227 |
| 2. Kerry Von Erich | 38 |
| 3. Jimmy Snuka | 34 |
| 4. Andre the Giant | 21 |
| 5. Zeus | 16 |
| Steve Williams | 16 |
| Woman | 16 |

Honorable mention: Jim Duggan 10

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1984 - Jimmy Snuka
- 1985 - Thunderbolt Patterson
- 1986 - Mike Von Erich
- 1987 - Bugsy McGraw
- 1988 - Steve Williams

RICH KERIN: I huff, puff, huff, puff, will crush, huff, puff, huff, puff, huff, anyone, huff, puff, huff, who gets, huff, puff, huff, puff, in my way. These are not interviews, they are anti-steroid messages. Not one entire sentence can be uttered by this man unless he takes a breath after each word.

MARK MADDEN: "But Stanley, I had the match won." That was the extent of Kerry Von Erich's coherence during the balloting period. I can't deny there was a lot of humor in his ramblings, such as when he pronounced Leaning Tower of Pizza like food instead of the town. But the only time Kerry should be allowed to speak on TV is during anti-drug ads. Okay, Kerry, for the last time, this (announcers shows egg) is drugs. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?

SMM: My favorite Kerry Von Erich interview was after he and his wife split up when he went on the house mic and said he'd be taking new phone numbers in the back.

ANDY STOWELL: The worst interview of the year was the one where Warrior ran out of breath taping up his Survivor team, then tried to talk. It was the worst interview of all-time. Thank God none of my friends saw it.

STEVE SIMS: Leon Spinks, my No. 2, would have won this but I just saw him on one interview during the year. It was the single worst interview I've ever seen. For year-long incompetence, though, the Ultimate Warrior takes the cake.

WORST PROMOTION

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION | 306 |
| 2. U.S. Wrestling Association | 66 |
| 3. World Wrestling Federation | 57 |
| 4. World Wrestling Council | 49 |
| ICW | 49 |

Honorable Mention: National Wrestling Alliance 21, Stampede Wrestling 13, Championship Wrestling Association 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - AWA
- 1987 - World Class
- 1988 - AWA

PAUL HANLIN: Welcome to the land of roidheads, freaks and geniuses, of roosters, blazers and macho kings. A land where the crowd heat comes from a machine and the real reactions come on cue when the music is played. You don't ever dare think of wearing, saying or let alone displaying anything that could be taken as acknowledgement of a competitor. WWF stands for Worst Wrestling Found.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: The WWF is not a wrestling promotion anymore and they even admit it. But they're not entertainment, either.

SMM: The NWA, because it's run by a mark.

JEFF MULLINS: Any promotion that uses Jose Gonzales is the worst promotion to be found anywhere.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: Nothing was worse than the AWA again. It's damn near hilarious trying to listen to these guys

tell you that Larry Zbyszko is a true World champion and that Baron Von Raschke is something other than a walking corpse.

SCOTT HUDSON: A prime spot on ESPN is something most promotions would kill for, yet these bozos put out such an inferior product that ESPN gave up on them.

ANTHONY AMARA: Titan Sports has convinced the world that pro wrestling "at its best" is indecent. A small black wrestler has to bleach his hair blond and blue. A big fat white man will become Africa's first black World champion. A famous veteran wrestler shoved his arm into human excrement. And the WWF claims to produce wholesome family entertainment.

CHRIS ZAVISA: I don't care one iota about the WWF's money and PR success. They have the world convinced that Titan is all that there is in wrestling but one thing stands out above it all. Their wrestling sucks. That's all.

BEST BOOKER

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 1. SHOHEI BABA | 251 |
| 2. Len Denton | 224 |
| 3. McMahon/Patterson | 95 |
| 4. Akira Maeda | 78 |
| 5. Ric Flair | 74 |

Honorable Mention: NWA summer booking committee 23, Eric Embry 11, Dutch Mantell 9

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1986 - Dusty Rhodes
1987 - Vince McMahon
1988 - Eddie Gilbert

RICH KERIN: The best are still Vince McMahon and Pat Patterson. They seem to have a lot more hits than misses when it comes to feuds and crowd response. It's time they start pushing some wrestlers instead of big men who can't wrestle.

TERESA DEMARIE: It's pretty obvious who was booking a lot of the better angles in Portland at the beginning of the year. It's supposed to be a big secret so I'll "skirt" the issue. Len Denton gets the credit for them and he gets the vote.

GREG ANDERSON: Len Denton wins this one as he has done so much with the smallest talent pool in the business. When you compare the promotion under Rip Oliver with what is being presented now, you realize the impact that a good booker has.

ERNIE SANTILLI: Len Denton, for making the most out of the least.

JOHN HITCHCOCK: Ric Flair. His only mistakes are losing Steamboat, which wasn't his fault, the Dragon Master and Gary Hart, which was, and working himself too hard.

MARK MADDEN: From the shrewd reversal of the Tsuruta-Tenryu roles to Momota-mania, Baba combined giving the people what they wanted with giving them entertaining wrestling and a successful promotion. If only he wasn't a wrestler anymore.

GABRIEL DAIGLE: I loved the All Japan shows this year. The loss of American talent hasn't hurt his booking one bit. A close second, overlooking their inconsistency for their tremendous moments of brilliance would be the NWA booking committee. Some great work in spots.

STEVE SIMS: Baba retained his dignity and old-style wrestling by concentrating on the basics and giving us winners and losers in every match. I had second thoughts about the way he treated Ricky Steamboat and the NWA title, but I guess that was just retaliation for what happened to Tenryu in Cleveland.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Baba has taken a staid and conservative promotion and energized it by making forceful decisions. Others should learn from his example. His cleaning out of dead wood while placing new emphasis on younger guys really helped take him into the 90s at the top.

VICKI LAUGHLIN: What Len Denton did with Portland this year was simply amazing.

PROMOTER OF THE YEAR

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| 1. AKIRA MAEDA | 326 |
| 2. Vince McMahon | 157 |
| 3. Shohei Baba | 156 |
| 4. Antonio Inoki | 51 |
| 5. Jim Herd | 30 |

Honorable Mention: Gary Juster 18

PREVIOUS WINNERS

1988 - Vince McMahon

MIKE OMANSKY: Vince McMahon is the biggest and the best. He's the only major promoter that understands his market and delivers accordingly with major financial success.

MARK MADDEN: To sustain the unbelievable interest in "real style" wrestling with limited TV, no gimmicks and a limited cast of wrestlers that Maeda has is amazing. Last year they looked like a flash in the pan. This year they're a supernova.

RICH KERIN: Vince McMahon is still the No. 1 promoter when it comes to promoting. His federation is the most profitable and the most recognized in the world. That's what promoting is all about.

PAUL HANLIN: Akira Maeda, for millions of reasons. Four of the top nine live gates ever, all in the same year. Record souvenir sales. He must be doing something right.

JEFF MULLINS: Because of my marketing background which tells me it's almost impossible to do anything big without television behind you, I have to vote Akira Maeda as Promoter of the year because of the spectacular results the UWF has had without any television.

MIKE WOOD: After watching the ceremony from Japan marking the first anniversary of Brody's death when Baba gathered all the wrestlers around the ring for a moment of total silence I knew I had just seen an example of the classiest promoter in wrestling.

JOHN JANCE: Akira Maeda has been able to break records without television. Now that is outstanding promoting.

JOE LANCELLO: Antonio Inoki's move into the Soviet Union and Red China took a lot of guts. He should be commended for his efforts.

TERESA DEMARIE: While Akira Maeda isn't my pick for humanitarian of the decade, his box office year speaks for itself.

CHRIS ZAVISA: Selling out the Tokyo Dome in record time was just the latest in a non-stop string of financial

successes. I don't think anyone should try and copy his formula, but everything Maeda does seems to work. Nobody could break all the rules and come out on top.

BEST GIMMICK

| | | |
|----|------------------------|-----|
| 1. | JUSHIN RIGER | 161 |
| 2. | Beetlejuice | 118 |
| 3. | Robin Green into Woman | 83 |
| 4. | Mr. Perfect | 29 |
| 5. | The Genius | 23 |

Honorable Mention: Skyscrapers 22, Rick Steiner character 22, Bushwackers 15, Zeus 9, Great Muta 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Adrian Street
- 1987 - Ted DiBiase's Million Dollar Man
- 1988 - Varsity Club/Rick Steiner

RICH KERIN: The Robin Green gimmick helped catapult Rick Steiner to the top of the popularity chart. She may not be good on interviews but with work she could contribute a good deal in terms of being a heel manager. They are still lacking in this area.

PAUL HANLIN: The Rick Steiner/Robin Green romance. Thoroughly entertaining stuff. Even though the parking lot mugging of Scott was a terrible finish, it was the best thing I saw all year.

MARK MADDEN: Robin Green's transformation into Woman. It was good because nobody saw it coming until the moment Rick Steiner and Jim Ross stepped up to Robin's hotel suite on the TBS show. In fact, until Kevin Sullivan and Mike Rotunda tore up the flowers Rick gave her 10 weeks into the angle, a lot of people didn't even know it was an angle. My only complaint was that Robin's turn on Rick was done too abruptly and that she should have turned on Rick directly, not through Scott. But otherwise it was a thoroughly enjoyable angle from start to finish. Robin did a pretty good ditzzy face interview. Little did we know.

GARY CAHALL: Beetlejuice. Let's hope those striped clothes aren't a portent.

TERESA DEMARIE: Beetlejuice is a perfect example of how a completely useless wrestler could be turned into a hot item by virtue of one skit. Maybe Vince should ask Piper for an idea on how to get Bravo over.

SAM NORD: Nobody cared about the Shepherders in the NWA but now everyone loves the Bushwackers.

STEVE GENNARELLI: In the juvenile world of the WWF, The Genius is one character we can all enjoy. I question why Poffo wasn't doing this three years ago.

WORST GIMMICK

| | | |
|----|--------------|-----|
| 1. | DING DONGS | 154 |
| 2. | Red Rooster | 90 |
| 3. | P.Y. Chu Hi | 41 |
| 4. | Dusty Rhodes | 36 |
| 5. | Norman | 25 |

Honorable Mention: Zeus 23, Matman 14, Woman 12, Col. DeBeers 8

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - "Adorable" Adrian Adonis
- 1987 - "Adorable" Adrian Adonis
- 1988 - Midnight Rider

JEFF MULLINS: Phil Hickerson trying to put himself over as Asian wrestler P.Y. Chu Hi is one of the most absurd gimmicks of all-time.

MARK MADDEN: After the great transformation of Robin Green into Woman, the NWA goes after the closet racists by putting a scantily-clad voluptuous white woman with two mammoth black men. Fortunately, it didn't work. Nobody cares about this trio.

TODD STUTTS: Terry Taylor as the Red Rooster. It's the stupidest gimmick I've ever seen. I do feel sorry for Taylor. Extremely sorry.

DAVID JACOBSEN: Lanny Poffo. The idea that a smart guy in wrestling has to be gay is really insulting.

JOHN JANCE: The use of Monsters in Memphis. It was a gimmick like this that put the nail in Los Angeles' coffin. This was a total act of desperation.

GARY CAHALL: In a year where the NWA tried imitation Bushwackers (Militia), imitation Bossmen (State Patrol) and imitation George Steele's (Norman), their own original gimmick, the Ding Dongs, was not only the worst one of the year, but of the decade.

JOEL LERMAN: The NWA's Japan-phobia. It's not over in the least with the fans and it's abhorrent anyway.

TERESA DEMARIE: The Ding Dongs should be hitched to a sleigh around this time of year now that they are out of work.

JOHN MCADAM: The Red Rooster. A gimmick is supposed to help a wrestler get over, not permanently destroy his career.

BOB CLOSSON: The stipulations in the Dukes-DeBeers matches were really embarrassing.

STEVE SIMS: As Brad Muster explained to some of his teammates at a house show we all attended, these guys (The Ding Dongs) make me embarrassed to be a wrestling fan.

MOST EMBARRASSING WRESTLER

| | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 1. | ANDRE THE GIANT | 116 |
| 2. | Dusty Rhodes | 102 |
| 3. | Red Rooster | 94 |
| 4. | Ultimate Warrior | 37 |
| 5. | Zeus | 31 |

Honorable Mention: Akeem 24, Bushwackers 21, Norman 18, Hulk Hogan 13, Ding Dongs

PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 1986 - Adrian Adonis
- 1987 - George Steele
- 1988 - George Steele

RICH KERIN: It's sad to see a man once held in high regard in the profession like Andre the Giant try and move an old and sick body around the ring. It embarrasses me when people ask me why he still wrestles in the condition he does. I wonder the same thing myself.

KAREN SHEHORN: It's sad that a wrestler who used to be of Ric Flair-calibre has sunk so low as the Red Rooster. It is said to look at him and I'm sorry that someone would have the power to do that to someone else just by offering him money.

JOHN JANCE: I cringe when I remember that Terry Taylor was once one of the ten best wrestlers in the world until he came to the WWF. Watching him hold back and become a jobber is sad, not to mention the career ruination from which he'll probably never recover from.

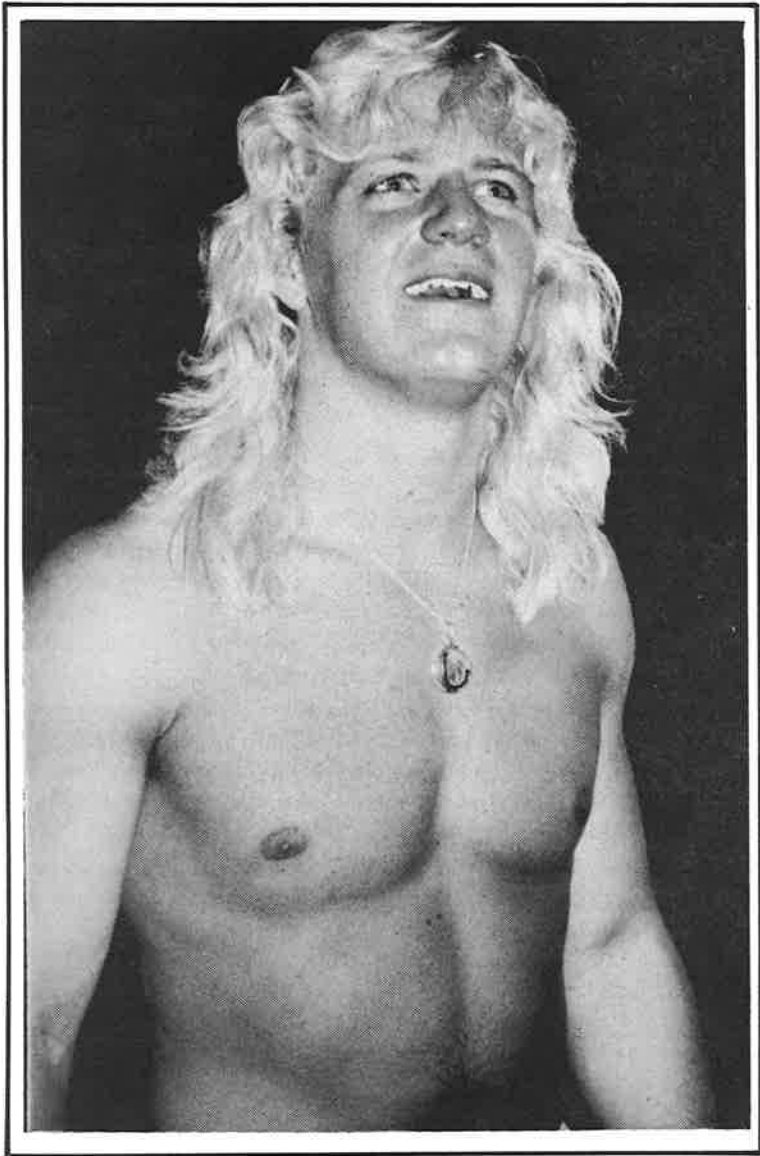
JOHN HITCHCOCK: When I was a kid, I loved Andre the Giant when he would come to Greensboro. But now I'm scared the guy is going to fall down and never get up again.

BRIAN TRAMEL: Terry Taylor doesn't exist anymore. This character is so embarrassing in that Taylor is such a good worker, but will be remembered as a chicken forever.

LARRY LOVELL: Terry Taylor's demeaning role as the Red Rooster was hard to watch. It reminded me of the fate that befell Anthony Quinn's character in the movie, "Requiem for a heavyweight."

STEVE GENNARELLI: I remember Terry Taylor as a great wrestler. The character isn't over and it's going to be a blight on him for the rest of his career.

SCOTT HUDSON: I've never heard such a negative response as I did when Dusty Rhodes entered the WWF. His lines about "doodoo is good for you" and about "beating his meat" were in extremely poor taste.



Answers to
Word Search Puzzle

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | R | Y | I | K | I | M | U | R | A | T |
| T | U | E | Y | G | J | A | P | Y | | |
| S | T | R | I | N | S | P | A | E | | |
| W | O | R | D | S | | | | | | |
| U | I | J | | | | | | | | |
| T | A | V | E | K | E | N | A | | | |
| A | O | E | A | A | M | O | S | | | |
| U | A | T | V | G | V | U | R | K | | |
| M | A | K | A | S | U | K | A | W | | |
| M | O | E | C | T | E | N | Y | R | U | W |

CHAMPIONS OF 1989

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

WWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Randy Savage (def. Ted DiBiase in tournament final March 27, 1988, in Atlantic City, NJ)
2. Hulk Hogan (def. Randy Savage April 2, 1989, in Atlantic City, NJ)

INTERCONTINENTAL

1. Anabolic Warrior (def. Honkeytonk Man August 29, 1988, in New York)
2. Rick Rude (def. Anabolic Warrior April 2, 1989, in Atlantic City, NJ)
3. Anabolic Warrior (def. Rick Rude August 28, 1989, in East Rutherford, NJ)

WWF TAG TEAM

1. Demolition (def. Rick Martel & Tito Santana March 27, 1988, in Atlantic City, NJ)
2. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson (def. Demolition July 18, 1989, in Worcester, MA)
3. Demolition (def. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson October 2, 1989, in Wheeling, WV)
4. Andre the Giant & Haku (def. Demolition December 13, 1989, in Huntsville, AL)

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Ric Flair (def. Ron Garvin November 26, 1987, in Chicago, IL)
2. Rick Steamboat (def. Ric Flair February 20, 1989, in Chicago, IL)
3. Ric Flair (def. Rick Steamboat May 7, 1989, in Nashville, TN)

UNITED STATES

1. Barry Windham (def. Nikita Koloff in tournament final May 13, 1988, in Houston, TX)
2. Lex Luger (def. Barry Windham February 20, 1989, in Chicago, IL)
3. Michael Hayes (def. Lex Luger May 7, 1989, in Nashville, TN)
4. Lex Luger (def. Michael Hayes May 22, 1989, in Bluefield, WV)

NWA TELEVISION

1. Rick Steiner (def. Mike Rotunda December 26, 1988, in Norfolk, VA)
2. Mike Rotunda (def. Rick Steiner February 20, 1989, in Chicago, IL)
3. Sting (def. Mike Rotunda April 1, 1989, in Atlanta, GA)
4. Title held up after Sting vs. Great Muta match July 23, 1989, in Baltimore, MD)
5. Great Muta (def. Sting September 3, 1989, in Atlanta, GA)

NWA TAG TEAM

1. Road Warriors (def. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane October 29, 1988, in New Orleans, LA)
2. Steve Williams & Mike Rotunda (def. Road Warriors April 2, 1989, in New Orleans, LA)

3. Title vacated after Steve Williams & Mike Rotunda vs. Road Warriors match May 7, 1989, in Nashville, TN)
4. Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin (def. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane in tournament finals June 18, 1989, in Fort Bragg, NC)
5. Rick & Scott Steiner (def. Michael Hayes & Jimmy Garvin November 1, 1989, in Atlanta, GA)

U.S. TAG TEAM

1. Steve Williams & Mike Rotunda (def. Tommy Rogers & Bobby Fulton December 26, 1988, in Norfolk, VA)
2. Eddie Gilbert & Rick Steiner (def. Kevin Sullivan & Dan Spivey April 2, 1989, in New Orleans, LA)
3. NWA dropped title recognition

CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

CWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Sid Vicious (def. Brian Lee December 10, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
2. Wendell Cooley (def. Sid Vicious January 2, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
3. Dutch Mantell (awarded title in fictitious match when Cooley quit the promotion in January)
4. Jeff Jarrett (def. Dutch Mantell March 11, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
5. Black Bart (def. Jeff Jarrett June 19, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
6. Texas Dirt (Dutch Mantell) (def. Black Bart September 4, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
7. Black Bart (def. Texas Dirt September 11, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
8. Texas Dirt (def. Black Bart September 18, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
9. Texas Dirt vacated title when he was allowed to return to area under real name of Dutch Mantell
10. Dirty White Boy (def. Dustin Rhodes in tournament final October 2, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
11. Bill Dundee (def. Dirty White Boy November 19, 1989, in Memphis, TN)

CWA TAG TEAM

1. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Gary Young & Cactus Jack Foley November 7, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
2. Scott Steiner & Jed Grundy (def. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden February 18, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
3. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Scott Steiner & Jed Grundy February 25, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
4. Jimmy Golden quit promotion, title belts vacated
5. Tracy Smothers & John Paul (def. Robert Fuller & Action Jackson in tournament final March 13, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
6. Robert Fuller & Brian Lee (def. Tracy Smothers & John Paul May 4, 1989, in Morristown, KY)
7. Action Jackson & Billy Travis (def. Robert Fuller & Brian Lee June 5, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
8. Chris Champion & Mark Starr (def. Action Jackson & Billy Travis July 1, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
9. Titles held up after Chris Champion & Mark Starr vs. Action Jackson & Billy Travis match July 3, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
10. Chris Champion & Mark Starr (def. Action Jackson & Billy Travis July 9, 1989, in Nashville, TN)
11. Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson (def. Chris Champion & Mark Starr September 16, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
12. Robert Gibson quit promotion, title belts vacated

U. S. WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

USWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jerry Lawler (def. Kerry Von Erich December 13, 1988, in Chicago, IL)
2. Master of Pain (def. Jerry Lawler April 1, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
3. Jerry Lawler continued to defend title in Texas and title was held up after a match with Kerry Von Erich April 7, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
4. Jerry Lawler (def. Kerry Von Erich to win Texas version of the title April 14, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
5. Jerry Lawler (def. Master of Pain to win Tennessee version April 24, 1989 in Memphis, TN)
6. Soul Taker (def. Jerry Lawler to win Tennessee version October 23, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
7. Jerry Lawler (def. Soul Taker to win Tennessee version November 6, 1989, in Memphis, TN)
8. King Cobra (def. Jerry Lawler to win Tennessee version December 30, 1989, in Memphis, TN)

TEXAS HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Iceman King Parsons (def. Kerry Von Erich who subbed for Kevin Von Erich August 5, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
2. Brickhouse Brown (def. Iceman King Parsons February 3, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
3. Gary Young (awarded title via forfeit from Brickhouse Brown March 5, 1989, in San Antonio, TX)
4. Eric Embry (def. Gary Young April 7, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
5. Super Zodiac (Gary Young) (def. Eric Embry May 19, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
6. Eric Embry (def. Super Zodiac May 26, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
7. P.Y. Chu Hi (def. Eric Embry June 30, 1989, in Wichita Falls, TX)
8. Eric Embry (def. P.Y. Chu Hi August 18, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
9. The Punisher (awarded title via forfeit from Eric Embry October 5, 1989, in Brownsville, TX)
10. Kerry Von Erich (def. The Punisher October 20, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
11. Jerry Lawler (def. Kerry Von Erich December 12, 1989, in Dallas, TX)

WCWA LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Cactus Jack Manson (def. Eric Embry December 30, 1988, in Dallas, TX)
2. Eric Embry (def. Cactus Jack Manson January 14, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
3. Title dropped in April when Eric Embry vacated title after winning Texas title

USWA TAG TEAM

1. Samoan Swat Team (def. Michael Hayes & Steve Cox October 17, 1988, in Fort Worth, TX)
2. Kevin & Kerry Von Erich (awarded titles when Samoan Swat Team left promotion in February)
3. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden (def. Kevin & Kerry Von Erich February 17, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
4. Kerry Von Erich & Jeff Jarrett (def. Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden March 12, 1989, in Fort Worth, TX)
5. Super Zodiac #2 & Cactus Jack Manson (def. Kerry Von Erich & Jeff Jarrett May 19, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
6. Mil Mascaras & Jeff Jarrett (def. Super Zodiac #2 & Cactus Jack Manson June 9, 1989, in Dallas, TX)

7. Robert Fuller & Brian Lee (def. Mil Mascaras & Jeff Jarrett June 23, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
8. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne (def. Robert Fuller & Brian Lee June 30, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
9. Cactus Jack Manson & Sheik Scott Braddock (def. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne August 4, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
10. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne (def. Cactus Jack Manson & Sheik Scott Braddock August 11, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
11. Ron Starr & Sheik Scott Braddock (def. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne September 15, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
12. Title held up after Ron Starr & Sheik Scott Braddock vs. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne match September 22, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
13. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne (def. Ron Starr & Sheik Scott Braddock September 29, 1989, in Dallas, TX)
14. Title vacated after Matt Borne lost loser leaves town match
15. Robert Fuller & Brian Lee (def. Jeff Jarrett & Matt Borne in tournament final December 1, 1989, in Dallas, TX)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION

AWA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jerry Lawler (def. Curt Hennig May 9, 1988, in Memphis, TN)
2. Jerry Lawler quit promotion after Superclash III payoff squabble, title vacated
3. Larry Zbyszko (won Battle Royal February 7, 1989 in St. Paul, MN)

AWA INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION

1. Greg Gagne (def. Ron Garvin via count out December 13, 1988, in Chicago, IL)

AWA WOMEN'S

1. Wendi Richter (def. Maceli November 26, 1988, in Bloomington, MN)
2. Title vacated when Wendi Richter quit promotion in December
3. Candi Divine (def. Judy Martin in elimination match December 6, 1989, in Toronto, ONT)

AWA TAG TEAM

1. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond (def. Shawn Michaels & Marty Janetty March 19, 1988, in Las Vegas, NV)
2. Ken Patera & Brad Rheingans (def. Pat Tanaka & Paul Diamond March 25, 1989, in Rochester, MN)
3. Brad Rheingans injured in angle on May 6, Ken Patera started defending title with Baron Von Raschke as partner
4. Titles held up after Ken Patera & Baron Von Raschke vs. Wayne Bloom & Mike Enos match September 18, 1989, in St. Cloud, MN
5. Wayne Bloom & Mike Enos (def. Greg Gagne & Paul Diamond in tournament final October 1, 1989, in Rochester, MN)

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Tatsumi Fujinami (def. Riki Choshu June 24, 1988, in Osaka)
2. Tatsumi Fujinami vacated title before Tokyo Dome card
3. Big Van Vader (def. Shinya Hashimoto in tournament final April 24, 1989, in Tokyo)

4. Salman Hashimikov (def. Big Van Vader May 25, 1989, in Osaka)
5. Riki Choshu (def. Salman Hashimikov July 12, 1989, in Osaka)
6. Big Van Vader (def. Riki Choshu August 10, 1989, in Tokyo)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Shiro Koshinaka (def. Owen Hart June 24, 1988, in Osaka)
2. Hiroshi Hase (def. Shiro Koshinaka March 19, 1989, in Yokohama)
3. Jushin Riger (def. Hiroshi Hase May 25, 1989, in Osaka)
4. Naoki Sano (def. Jushin Riger August 10, 1989, in Tokyo)

IWGP TAG TEAM

1. Riki Choshu & Masa Saito (def. Tatsumi Fujinami & Kengo Kimura June 10, 1988, in Hiroshima)
2. Super Strong Machine & George Takano (def. Riki Choshu & Masa Saito, March 19, 1989, in Yokohama)
3. Riki Choshu & Takayuki Iizuka (def. Super Strong Machine & George Takano July 13, 1989, in Tokyo)
4. Masa Saito & Shinya Hashimoto (def. Riki Choshu & Takayuki Iizuka September 20, 1989, in Osaka)

ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

PWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Stan Hansen (def. Genichiro Tenryu July 27, 1988, in Nagano)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Stan Hansen April 18, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Genichiro Tenryu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta June 5, 1989, in Tokyo)
4. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Genichiro Tenryu October 11, 1989, in Yokohama)

INTERNATIONAL HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Bruiser Brody April 19, 1988, in Sendai)
2. Genichiro Tenryu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta June 5, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Jumbo Tsuruta (def. Genichiro Tenryu October 11, 1989, in Yokohama)

UNITED NATIONAL HEAVYWEIGHT

Same as PWF heavyweight title

PWF JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Masa Fuchi (def. Kuniaki Kobayashi January 3, 1987, in Tokyo)
2. Joe Malenko (def. Masa Fuchi January 20, 1989, in Fukuoka)
3. Mighty Inoue (def. Joe Malenko January 25, 1989, in Osaka)
4. Masa Fuchi (def. Mighty Inoue March 8, 1989, in Tokyo)
5. Shinichi Nakano (def. Masa Fuchi April 16, 1989, in Tokyo)
6. Mitsuo Momota (def. Shinichi Nakano April 20, 1989, in Osaka)
7. Joe Malenko (def. Mitsuo Momota July 1, 1989, in Omiya)
8. Masa Fuchi (def. Joe Malenko October 20, 1989, in Nagoya)

PWF & INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy (def. Genichiro Tenryu & Toshiaki Kawada in tournament final December 13, 1988, in Tokyo)
2. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Stan Hansen & Terry Gordy February 2, 1989, in Kansas City, KS)
3. Stan Hansen & Genichiro Tenryu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu July 11, 1989, in Sapporo)
4. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu (def. Stan Hansen & Genichiro Tenryu July 22, 1989, in Ishikawa)
5. Stan Hansen & Genichiro Tenryu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu October 20, 1989, in Nagoya)
6. Stan Hansen & Genichiro Tenryu vacated titles before the annual tag team tournament
7. Stan Hansen & Genichiro Tenryu (def. Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu in tag team tournament finals December 6, 1989, in Tokyo)

ALL-ASIAN TAG TEAM

1. Toshiaki Kawada & Samson Fuyuki (def. Shunji Takano & Shinichi Nakano September 15, 1988, in Tokyo)
2. Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas (def. Toshiaki Kawada & Samson Fuyuki June 5, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Toshiaki Kawada & Samson Fuyuki (def. Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas October 20, 1989, in Nagoya)

ALL JAPAN WOMEN

WWWA

1. Title vacant after August 25, 1988 match between Chigusa Nagayo vs. Lioness Asuka
2. Lioness Asuka (def. Chigusa Nagayo January 29, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Lioness Asuka retired in October, title vacated

IWA

1. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Rhonda Singh in tournament final September 22, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Madusa Maceli (def. Chigusa Nagayo January 4, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Madusa Maceli January 5, 1989, in Tokyo)
4. Chigusa Nagayo retired in May, title vacated
5. Madusa Maceli (def. Beastie in elimination match September 14, 1989, in Kumamoto)

PACIFIC

1. Chigusa Nagayo (def. Leilani Kai April 27, 1987, in Osaka)
2. Chigusa Nagayo retired in May, title vacated
3. Bull Nakano (def. Mitsuko Nishiwaki in elimination match June 18, 1989, in Tokyo)
4. Noriyo Tateno (def. Bull Nakano November 13, 1989, in Ashikaga)

JAPANESE

1. Mika Komatsu (def. Yumi Ogura July 10, 1988, in Edmonton, ALTA)
2. Mika Komatsu retired in February, title vacated
3. Reuben Amada (def. Erica Shishedo in elimination match August 24, 1989, in Tokyo)
4. Reuben Amada retired in October, title vacated
5. Minami Toyota (def. Mika Takahashi in elimination match November 17, 1989, in Masuda)

WWWA TAG TEAM

1. Yumi Ogura & Mika Komatsu (def. Yumiko Hotta & Mitsuko Nishiwaki August 25, 1988, in Kawasaki)
2. Chigusa Nagayo & Lioness Asuka (def. Yumi Ogura & Mika Komatsu March 4, 1989, in Tokyo)
3. Chigusa Nagayo retired in May, title vacated
4. Akira Hokkuto & Shizuka Minami (def. Bull Nakano & Kumiko Iwamoto in elimination match, June 18, 1989, in Tokyo)
5. Yumiko Hotta & Mitsuko Nishiwaki (def. Akira Hokkuto & Shizuka Minami July 19, 1989, in Tokyo)
6. Grizzly Iwamoto & Aja Kong (def. Yumiko Hotta & Mitsuko Nishiwaki December 9, 1989, in Tokyo)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

PACIFIC NORTHWEST HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Top Gun (def. The Grappler December 25, 1988, in Portland, OR)
2. The Grappler (def. Top Gun January 28, 1989, in Portland, OR)
3. Carl Styles (def. The Grappler April 1, 1989, in Portland, OR)
4. The Grappler (def. Carl Styles April 15, 1989, in Portland, OR)
5. Carl Styles (def. The Grappler April 22, 1989, in Portland, OR)
6. Carl Styles injured, title vacated
7. Scotty The Body (def. Carl Styles in tournament final September 2, 1989, in Portland, OR)
8. Rex King (def. Scotty The Body October 7, 1989, in Portland, OR)
9. Scotty The Body (def. Rex King October 14, 1989, in Portland, OR)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TAG TEAM

1. Abbuda Dein & The Grappler (def. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson October 29, 1988, in Portland, OR)
2. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. Abbuda Dein & The Grappler January 7, 1989, in Portland, OR)
3. Buddy Rose & Col. DeBeers (def. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson January 28, 1989, in Portland, OR)
4. Buddy Rose injured in March, titles vacated
5. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson (def. The Grappler & Col. DeBeers in tournament final April 29, 1989, in Portland)
6. Top Gun & Scotty The Body (def. Steve Doll & Scott Peterson July 8, 1989, in Portland)
7. Top Gun & Scotty The Body split up July 22, 1989, titles vacated
8. Scotty The Body & The Grappler (Scotty def. Top Gun where winner got both belts August 5, 1989, in Portland, OR, Scotty chose Grappler as partner)
9. Rex King & Steve Doll (def. Scotty The Body & The Grappler August 26, 1989, in Portland, OR)
10. Titles held up after Rex King & Steve Doll vs. Scotty The Body & The Grappler match September 9, 1989, in Portland, OR)
11. Rex King & Steve Doll (def. Scotty The Body & The Grappler September 16, 1989, in Portland, OR)
12. Titles held up after Rex King & Steve Doll vs. Brian Adams & Jeff Warner match November 4, 1989, in Portland, OR)
13. Rex King & Steve Doll (def. Brian Adams & Jeff Warner November 11, 1989, in Portland, OR)
14. The Grappler & Brian Adams (def. Rex King & Steve Doll December 14, 1989, in Salem, OR)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST TELEVISION

1. Top Gun (def. Al Madril October 29, 1988, in Portland, OR)
2. Abbuda Dein (def. Top Gun January 14, 1989, in Portland, OR)
3. Carl Styles (def. Abbuda Dein January 28, 1989, in Portland, OR)
4. Carl Styles injured in April, vacated title
5. Al Madril (won tournament October 19, 1989, in Portland, OR)
6. Rex King (def. Al Madril November 25, 1989, in Portland, OR)

STAMPEDE WRESTLING

NORTH AMERICAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Don Muraco (def. Makhan Singh December 9, 1988 in Medicine Hat, ALTA)
2. Davey Boy Smith (def. Don Muraco March 24, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Larry Cameron (def. Davey Boy Smith April 28, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH MID-HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Johnny Smith (def. Chris Benoit June 24, 1988 in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Chris Benoit (def. Johnny Smith January 13, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Great Gama (def. Chris Benoit August 4, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
4. Bruce Hart (def. Great Gama October 14, 1989, in Lethbridge, ALTA)

INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM

1. Makhan Singh & Gary Albright (def. Dynamite Kid & Davey Boy Smith December 30, 1988, in Calgary, ALTA)
2. Chris Benoit & Biff Wellington (def. Makhan Singh & Gary Albright April 8, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
3. Bob & Kerry Brown (def. Chris Benoit & Biff Wellington)
4. Sumu Hara & Kensuke Sasaki (def. Bob & Kerry Brown August 18, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
5. The Black Harts (def. Sumu Hara & Kensuke Sasaki September 29, 1989, in Calgary, ALTA)
6. Black Harts left territory in December, titles vacated

CONTINENTAL WRESTLING FEDERATION

CWF HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Tom Prichard (def. Dirty White Boy in tournament final October 3, 1988, in Birmingham, AL)
2. Wendell Cooley (def. Tom Prichard April 7, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)
3. Tom Prichard (def. Wendell Cooley June 23, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)
4. Dennis Condrey (def. Tom Prichard July 22, 1989, in Dothan, AL)

U.S. JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Danny Davis (awarded title when Ken Wayne left territory, November, 1988)
2. Cowboy Kevin Dillinger (def. Danny Davis May 5, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)
3. Danny Davis (def. Kevin Dillinger June 9, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)

4. Danny Davis left territory, title vacated
5. Downtown Bruno (def. Butch Cassidy in elimination match September 22, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)

CWF TAG TEAM

1. Jerry Stubbs & Dirty White Boy (def. The Bullet & Brad Armstrong December 25, 1988, in Knoxville, TN)
2. Johnny & Davey Rich (def. Jerry Stubbs & Dirty White Boy February 17, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)
3. Mike Davis & Masa Chono (def. Johnny & Davey Rich May 5, 1989, in Knoxville, TN)
4. Masa Chono deported, titles vacated
5. Jimmy Golden & Mongolian Stomper (awarded titles in May)
6. Mongolian Stomper left territory, titles vacated
7. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong (awarded titles in August)
8. Jimmy Golden & Brian Lee (def. Smothers & Armstrong August 26, 1989, in Dothan, AL)

WORLD WRESTLING COUNCIL

UNIVERSAL

1. Carlos Colon (def. Ron Garvin December 18, 1988, in San Juan, PR)
2. Steve Strong (def. Carlos Colon May 20, 1989, in Caguas, PR)
3. Title held up after Carlos Colon vs. Steve Strong match October 7, 1989 in Bayamon, PR
4. Carlos Colon (def. Steve Strong November 23, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)
5. Leo Burke (def. Carlos Colon December 17, 1989, in Mayaguez, PR)

PUERTO RICAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Hercules Ayala (def. Ricky Santana December 17, 1988, in Bayamon, PR)
2. Hercules Ayala lost loser leaves town match in January, title vacated
3. Abbuda Dein (def. TNT in tournament final March 4, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)
4. Invader #1 (def. Abbuda Dein May 14, 1989, in San Juan, PR)
5. Ivan Koloff (def. Invader #1 July 15, 1989, in Caguas, PR)
6. Invader #1 (def. Ivan Koloff October 7, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)

CARIBBEAN HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Jason the Terrible (def. TNT November 11, 1988, in Carolina, PR)
2. TNT (def. Jason the Terrible March 4, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)
3. Rip Rogers (def. TNT May 14, 1989, in San Juan, PR)
4. Miguelito Perez (def. Rip Rogers November 4, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)

WWC JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT

1. El Profe (def. Invader #3 November 16, 1988 in Cataño, PR)
2. Ricky Santana (def. El Profe January 14, 1989, in Caguas, PR)
3. Jonathan Holiday (def. Ricky Santana April 2, 1989, in Agadilla, PR)
4. Super Medico (def. Jonathan Holiday May 6, 1989, in Caguas, PR)
5. Chicky Starr (def. Super Medico July 15, 1989, in Caguas, PR)

6. Super Medico (def. Chicky Starr August 4, 1989, in Caguas, PR)

WWC TAG TEAM

1. Bart & Brad Batten (def. Ron & Chicky Starr November 12, 1988, in Caguas, PR)
2. Tama the Islander & Dan Kroffat (def. Bart & Brad Batten January 6, 1989, in San Juan, PR)
3. Bart & Brad Batten (def. Tama the Islander & Dan Kroffat March 4, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)
4. Jason the Terrible & Steve Strong (def. Bart & Brad Batten March 11, 1989, in Caguas, PR)
5. Carlos Colon & Invader #1 (awarded titles April 8, 1989, in Carolina, PR when Jason the Terrible & Steve Strong forfeited the match as Jason was injured with a shattered kneecap)
6. Abbuda Dein & Rip Rogers (def. Carlos Colon & Invader #1 May 17, 1989, in Vega, PR)
7. Miguelito Perez & Hurricane Castillo Jr. (def. Abbuda Dein & Rip Rogers July 16, 1989, in Mayaguez, PR)
8. Abbuda Dein & Rip Rogers (def. Miguelito Perez & Hurricane Castillo Jr. August 5, 1989, in San Juan, PR)
9. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Abbuda Dein & Rip Rogers October 7, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)

CARIBBEAN TAG TEAM

1. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez (def. Bobby Jagers & Dan Kroffat September 16, 1988, in Bayamon, PR)
2. Mr. Pogo & Kensuke Sasaki (def. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez)
3. Mark & Chris Youngblood (def. Mr. Pogo & Kensuke Sasaki March 4, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)
4. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez (awarded titles when Youngbloods left the promotion)
5. Mr. Pogo & Kensuke Sasaki (def. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez April 1, 1989, in San Juan, PR)
6. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez (def. Mr. Pogo & Kensuke Sasaki)
7. Cuban Assassin & Jerry Morrow (def. Hurricane Castillo Jr. & Miguelito Perez October 7, 1989, in Bayamon, PR)

FLORIDA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT

1. Mike Graham (def. The Terminator December 25, 1988, in Tampa, FL)
2. Al Perez (def. Mike Graham March 11, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
3. Dustin Rhodes (def. Al Perez May 23, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
4. Kendall Windham (def. Dustin Rhodes June 27, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
5. Steve Keirn (def. Kendall Windham August 24, 1989, in Tampa, FL)

FLORIDA TAG TEAM

1. Johnny Ace & The Terminator
2. Nasty Boys (def. Johnny Ace & The Terminator March 24, 1989, in St. Petersburg, FL)
3. Bobby Jagers & Black Bart (def. Nasty Boys March 28, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
4. Dustin Rhodes & Mike Graham (def. Bobby Jagers & Black Bart May 9, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
5. Black Bart & Dirty White Boy (def. Dustin Rhodes & Mike Graham)
6. Nasty Boys (def. Black Bart & Dirty White Boy June 11, 1989, in Orlando, FL)

7. Brett Sawyer & Jimmy Backlund (awarded titles when Nasty Boys were fired)
8. Nasty Boys (def. Brett Sawyer & Jimmy Backlund August 22, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
9. Jumbo Barretta & Dennis Knight (def. Nasty Boys October 17, 1989, in Tampa, FL)
10. Mark Starr & Lou Perez (def. Jumbo Barretta & Dennis Knight November 12, 1989, in Orlando, FL)
11. Bounty Hunters (def. Mark Starr & Lou Perez November 16, 1989, in Tampa, FL)

WRESTLING FAMILIES

Because pro wrestling for years had been somewhat of a closed profession, there has always been a tendency to have famous wrestling families and dynasties. While some wrestling families, like the Valiant brothers, the original Golden Grahams or the Andersons, were actually never blood relatives, many of today's top wrestling stars are a part of a family with a pro wrestling heritage.

Some of today's wrestlers who are part of famous wrestling families include:

ANOIA - The famous Samoan brothers tag team of Afa and Sika Anoaia, The Wild Samoans out of San Francisco, spawned several of today's leading Samoan wrestlers. Afa's son Samula and Sika's son Kokina and nephews Solfa and Sam Fatu are all current wrestlers using the ring names SST Samu, Kokina Maximus, SST Fatu and Samoan Savage respectively.

ANDERSON - While most of the famous Anderson clan from Minnesota weren't even Andersons at all, NWA prelim wrestler Brad Anderson, who also works under a hood as Agent Steele, is the son of Gene Anderson. Gene Anderson wrestled primarily in the Carolinas from the early 60s through the mid 80s as the tag team partner of fictitious brothers Ole (Alan Rogowski) and Lars (Larry Heiniemi). In late 1982, Arn Anderson (Marty Lunde) was created, and has been billed at times as the son, brother, nephew and cousin of Ole

ARMSTRONG - Bob Armstrong, who originally gained fame as the "Fighting Fireman from Marietta, GA" in the late 60s, has had sons Brad, Steve and Scott follow in his footsteps as the Armstrong wrestling clan. Bob still wrestles, under a mask, as "The Bullet," although it is readily acknowledged who he really is and that the Armstrongs are his sons. Armstrong is the wrestling name for the quartet whose real last name is James.

BARR - Brothers Jesse and Art Barr wrestle under the ring names Jimmy Jack Funk and Beetlejuice, respectively. Both are sons of former pro wrestler and current Oregon promoter and referee "Dandy" Sandy Barr.

BATTEN - Identical twin brothers Bart and Brad have wrestled together for six years as the Batten Twins.

BORNE - "Maniac" Matt Borne in Texas is the son of "Tough Tony" Borne, a top wrestling heel from the mid-50s through the late 70s. Borne is short for Osborne, the family's real surname.

BLANCHARD - Tully Blanchard is the son of former pro wrestler Joe Blanchard, who wrestled from the mid-50s through the mid-70s and also promoted wrestling in Southern Texas for years. The eldest Blanchard stepped into the ring as late as 1984 for his defunct Southwest Championship Wrestling promotion, of which his son Tully was the lead heel in for many years.

BRAZOS - The three wrestlers in Mexico who wrestle as the masked tag team of El Brazo, Brazo de Oro & Brazo de

Plata for the past dozen or so years are all brothers, real names George, Juan and Jesus Alvarado.

BROWN - Current wrestlers "Bulldog" Bob Brown and Kerry "Pit Bull" Brown, who held the tag team championship this past summer for Stampede Wrestling and now work based out of Winnipeg, Manitoba, are father-and-son.

CASAS - Lighter weight superstar Negro Casas (real name Juan Casas) in Mexico was joined this past year by his younger brother, who uses the ring name Canelo Casas. Both are second generation wrestlers, as their father wrestled under the name Pepe Casas.

CASTILLO - Puerto Rican babyface Hurricane Castillo Jr. (real name Daniel Castillo), is of course the son of former wrestler Hurricane Castillo. Castillo worked in the early 70s in the United States as journeyman masked wrestler El Olimpico.

CHARLES - Mexican Emilio Charles Jr. is the son of former wrestler Emilio Charles.

COMBS - Current wrestler Debbie Combs is the daughter of long-time female star Cora Combs. Real last name of the two is Szotecki.

COOLEY - "Wildcat" Wendell Cooley, who has wrestled for the past several years in the Southeast, has a younger brother, Greg Cooley, who did some wrestling a few years back.

DEATON - The Outlaw Deaton brothers, Joel and Hoss, are actually brothers Joseph and David Jones.

DEMON - Current wrestler Blue Demon Jr. is the son of the famous movie star Blue Demon in Mexico, who retired at the age of 67 just this past year.

DIBIASE - "The Million Dollar Man," who is one of best workers of this past decade, is the stepson of former pro wrestler "Iron" Mike DiBiase, who was a collegiate wrestling star and later NWA jr. heavyweight champion. His mother, Helen Hild, was one of the top female wrestlers in the early 50s. A younger brother, John, tried pro wrestling several years back, but didn't stick with it.

DUNDEE - Wrestler "Superstar" Bill Dundee is the father-in-law of "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton of the Midnight Express and father of sometimes-manager Jamie Dundee.

FRANCIS - Big Bill Francis, who wrestles in Oregon, is the son of former NWA jr. heavyweight champion and long-time Hawaiian promoter "Gentleman" Edmund Francis. His younger brother Russ Francis played NFL football for the New England Patriots and San Francisco 49ers and also wrestled during the off-season while in college and early in his pro football career.

FULLER - Robert and Ron Fuller, whose real last name is Welch, are part of a huge three-generation-long wrestling dynasty in the Southeast. Their father, Buddy Fuller (Lester Welch), promoted many territories and wrestled for years, as

did his father, Roy Welch. Robert's wife Sylvia Welch is a valet, and numerous cousins and other relatives have worked in the profession over the past 50 years.

FULTON - Brothers Bobby and Jackie Fulton, real last name Hines from Chillicothe, OH, wrestle as The Fantastics.

FUNK - Perhaps the most famous wrestling family of them all. Terry Funk, the NWA World heavyweight champion from 1975-77 is the younger brother of Dory Funk, Jr., also NWA heavyweight champ from 1969-73. The two are sons of Dory Funk, Sr., a wrestling headliner for 34 years who died after a match in 1973 and was also promoter of the old West Texas circuit for several decades. Dory and Terry are the only brothers to have both been NWA World heavyweight champions. Jimmy Jack Funk, who has been billed as both the youngest brother and also a cousin, is actually Jesse Barr, another second generation wrestler.

GAGNE - Greg Gagne, who is expected to be retiring as a wrestler shortly, is the son of legendary wrestler Verne Gagne, the AWA World heavyweight champion on-and-off from the early 60s through his retirement as champion in 1981. Verne Gagne also promoted the AWA for the last two decades. His son-in-law, Larry Zbyszko, is the current AWA champion.

GARVIN - The original Garvin brothers consisted of Ronnie (Roger Barnes) and Terry (Terry Joyal) in the late 60s. Jimmy Garvin (James Williams) joined the trio as manager in the early 70s, and shortly thereafter became an active pro wrestler. Although Ron and Jimmy were billed as brothers, Ron is actually the step-father of Jimmy. In 1983, Jimmy's wife Patty joined the wrestling business as Jimmy's valet "Precious, although she left the business this past year.

GILBERT - Brothers Eddie "Hotstuff" Gilbert and Doug "Hit-man" Gilbert are the sons of long-time Tennessee star Tommy Gilbert. Eddie's wife, Missy Hyatt, has been a valet and television announcer.

GOLDEN - Jimmy Golden is the son of former wrestler Billy Golden, who was actually a member of the Welch family and brother of Lester Welch, which makes Jimmy a cousin to Ron and Robert Fuller.

GONZALES - Jose Gonzales, who wrestles and books in Puerto Rico as Invader #1, is the older brother of prelim wrestler Maelo Huertas.

GOTCH - Current UWF referee Masami Soranaka is the son-in-law of pro wrestling legend Karl Gotch (real name Karl Istaz) of Austria.

GRAHAM - The only active member of the long-time Graham dynasty is Tampa's Mike Graham. Mike is the son of long-time wrestler and promoter Eddie Graham. The family's real surname is Gossett. Eddie was part of the famous Golden Grahams which included former wrestlers Jerry Graham (the only one really named Graham), Crazy Luke Graham (James Johnson) and Superstar Billy Graham (Wayne Coleman).

GUERRERO - Brothers Chavo, Mando, Hector and Eddie Guerrero are the sons of former Mexican wrestling legend Salvador Gory Guerrero.

HAMADA - Female wrestler Sochi Hamada, who wrestles for the JWP in Japan, is the daughter of Mexican light weight star El Gran Hamada, who is originally from Japan.

HARRIS - Wrestlers Brian Lee and Don "Stomper" Harris are brothers Brian and Don Harris. Another brother, Ron Harris, wrestled in 1988 in Tennessee.

HART - One of the largest wrestling families is the Harts from Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Stu Hart, a long-time wrestler and promoter in Western Canada had eight sons follow him into wrestling. Bret, Owen and Bruce are still active as wrestlers, while Wayne, Dean, Keith and Ross occasionally wrestle, referee, or in the case of the latter, do publicity and announce. Smith Hart also wrestled in the late 70s. Two others are brothers-in-law to the Hart wrestling clan, Davey Boy Smith and Jim Neidhart.

HENNIG - Mr. Perfect of WWF fame, Curt Hennig, is the son of long-time AWA wrestler Larry "The Axe" Hennig.

IAUKEA - The wrestler Abbuda Dein in Puerto Rico is the son of former pro wrestling main eventer King Curtis Iaukea, who was a top name internationally in the 60s through the mid 70s and last worked as heel manager The Wizard in the WWF a few years back.

IRWIN - "Wild Bill" Irwin is the younger brother of the late Scott Irwin, who wrestled from the mid-70s through 1986, and gained his greatest fame as the Super Destroyer in Atlanta and one of the Yukon Lumberjacks as WWWF tag team champions in the late 70s.

JALISCO - El Rayo de Jalisco Jr. is naturally the son of long-time Mexican star El Rayo de Jalisco.

JARRETT - Jeff Jarrett is the son of former wrestler and current Texas and Tennessee wrestling promoter Jerry Jarrett. His grandfather, Eddie Marlin, wrestled for nearly 30 years, mainly in the Tennessee area.

KAI - Female wrestler Leilani Kai is the wife of former pro wrestler Hans Schroder (Johnny Karisma).

LAURINIDAS - Brothers Joe, Johnny and Marc wrestle under the ring names Road Warrior Animal, Johnny Ace and The Terminator for the NWA. None of the three have actually been acknowledged as kin in the United States, although it is well known they are brothers in Japan and the three worked together in a six-man tag while touring Japan this past March.

LEDUC - Jos LeDuc had a younger brother, Paul LeDuc, who wrestled in the 70s and was his frequent tag team partner.

MALENKO - Brothers Joe and Dean Malenko (real last name Simon) are sons of former pro wrestler Larry Simon, who gained his greatest wrestling fame as the Russian Professor Boris Malenko.

MOMOTA - "Mr. 6:30" Mitsuo Momota of Momotamania fame in the All Japan promotion this past year is the son of Japan's most famous wrestler ever, Rikidozan (real name Mitsuhiro Momota), the Babe Ruth of Japanese wrestling until his death of a stab wound in 1963. Brother Yoshihiro Momota also wrestled.

MORTON - Ricky Morton of the "Rock and Roll Express" is the son of long-time pro wrestling referee Paul Morton of Nashville.

MURDOCH - Dick Murdoch is the son of former wrestler Frankie Hill Murdoch who wrestled from the 30s through the 50s.

ORTON - Bob Orton is the son of pro wrestler Bob Orton, Sr. who wrestled from the 50s through the mid 70s and

brother of Barry Orton, who has wrestled for years and is currently in prison for manslaughter in an auto accident case.

PEREZ - Miguelito Perez (real name Jose Miguel Perez, Jr.) is the son of Miguel Perez, a leading attraction in the late 50s as the tag team partner of Argentina Rocca in Madison Square Garden.

POFFO - Brothers Randy "Macho Man" Savage and "The Genius" are WWF headliners. They are really brothers Randy and Lanny Poffo, whose father, Angelo Poffo, wrestled from the early 50s and wrestled as late as this past year on independent shows. Randy's wife, formerly Liz Heulette, is best known as "Elizabeth" in the WWF.

PRICHARD - Wrestler Tom Prichard and WWF personality Brother Love (Bruce Prichard) are brothers.

RHODES - Long-time major attraction Dusty Rhodes (real name Virgil Riley Runnels, Jr.) was joined in late 1988 by son Dustin Rhodes (Dustin Runnels).

ROCCO - Veteran British star Mark "Rollerball" Rocco, better known in Japan as The Black Tiger, is a second generation wrestler, who real name is Mark Hussey. His father wrestled in England as Mike Hussey.

RODRIGUEZ - Although the names Aaron and Miguel Rodriguez wouldn't ring a bell with most pro wrestling fans, they are two of the biggest stars ever in Mexico as Mil Mascaras and Dos Caras. Mascaras was one of the game's biggest stars on a worldwide basis from the late 60s, where he was so popular in Mexico that he was a movie idol ala Hulk Hogan, through the early 80s. He toured throughout North America, but was a particular favorite in areas with large spanish populations. He also was a huge favorite in Africa and Japan, where he preceded the original Tiger Mask as the idol of the Japanese children. While still active in Mexico, he is no longer an international star. Caras, whom many agree was actually the more talented of the two, was a big star and frequent World heavyweight champion in Mexico. He had some popularity in Japan, but not nearly on the level of his brother, and his U.S. stints were limited mainly to border towns in Southern California and Southern Texas. Another brother, whose wrestling name was El Sicodelico, has wrestled on-and-off over the past two decades, but was never a major star. Kinship between the three has always been acknowledged.

ROUGEAU - Brothers Jacques (real name James) and Raymond, the Fabulous Rougeaus brothers, are the sons of former Quebec wrestler Jacques Rougeau, Sr. Their uncle Johnny Rougeau was also a major attraction in Quebec and still holds the Montreal wrestling attendance record for a 1971 match against The Sheik.

ROYAL - Father Nelson Royal has used daughter Sha Sha (Shannon Royal) as valet in 1989.

SAMMARTINO - David Sammartino is the son of pro wrestling legend Bruno Sammartino who wrestled from 1958-1987 and held the WWWF heavyweight championship on two occasions.

SANTO - El Hijo del Santo (which in spanish means Son of El Santo), who is the top lighter weight box office attraction in Mexico today is the son of El Santo, the most famous name in the history of Lucha Libre. The elder Santo wrestled from the 30s through 1982 and passed away in 1984. The younger Santo's real name is Rudolfo Huerta, Jr., and father was Rudolfo Huerta.

SAVOLDI - "Jumping" Joe Savoldi is the son of former NWA jr. heavyweight champion Angelo Savoldi (real family

last name is Farini) and brother of ICW promoter Mario Savoldi.

SAWYER - Brett and Buzz Sawyer are brothers, with their real last name being Moyan.

SHARPE - Journeyman wrestler "Iron Mike" Sharpe is the son of the original "Iron Mike" Sharpe of Hamilton, Ontario and nephew of Ben Sharpe, who were a famous tag team on the West Coast in the 50s.

SIMPSON - Brothers Steve, Schaun and Stuart, real last name Kohen, are the sons of South African wrestling promoter Sam Kohen.

SINGH - Tiger Jeet Singh of Canada is the son of Daro Singh of India.

SMITH - Wrestlers Sam Houston (Michael Smith) and Jake "The Snake" Roberts (Aurelian Smith, Jr.) are sons of former pro wrestler Grizzly Smith (Aurelian Smith, Sr.). Smith's daughter Robin Smith wrestles as Rockin Robin, while daughter-in-law Nickla Smith (married to Sam Houston) worked as valet Baby Doll for several years. Nickla Smith is also a second-generation performer, as her father, Nick Roberts, wrestled and promoted in Texas, and mother Lorraine Johnson was one of the leading female wrestlers of the 50s.

SMITH - Brothers David Ashford-Smith and Mark Ashford-Smith wrestle under the ring names of Chris Champion and Mark Starr. The two tag teamed together in the CWA this past year as The Wildside, and were acknowledged as being brothers.

STEAMBOAT - Ricky and Vic Steamboat (who wrestles in the ICW) are brothers. Real last name is Blood.

STEINER - The Steiner brothers, Scott and Rick, both former collegiate wrestling stars at the University of Michigan, are brothers. Their real last name is Rechsteiner.

STREET - Adrian Street and valet Miss Linda (Linda Street) are married.

TAKANO - Gyoji (George) and Shunji Takano, who wrestle for New Japan and All Japan respectively, are brothers.

TANAKA - Pat Tanaka is the son of famous wrestling heel Duke Keomuka (Duke Tanaka), who was a major star in the 50s and 60s.

TIMBS - Ken, who wrestles in Mexico as Fabuloso Blondie had an older brother, Ed Timbs, who wrestled for a brief period in Georgia as a jobber in the early 80s.

VACHON - Luna Vachon, who occasionally wrestles (real name Angelle Vachon) is the daughter of former pro wrestler Paul "Butcher" Vachon and niece of Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon and Vivian Vachon. Luna Vachon is married to Dick Slater, and has a brother, Mike Vachon, who wrestled in the early 80s.

VALENTINE - Greg "The Hammer" Valentine is the son of wrestling legend Johnny Valentine, a main eventer from 1947 until his career ended in 1975. Their real names are John Anthony Wisniski, Jr. and Sr., respectively.

VON ERICH - Kevin and Kerry Von Erich (real family name Adkisson) are the remaining sons of former major attraction and later wrestling promoter Fritz Von Erich (Jack Adkisson). Brothers Mike and David Von Erich also

wrestled before passing away in 1986 and 1984 respectively of drug overdoses.

WAYNE – Ken Wayne is the son of former pro wrestler Buddy Wayne.

WINDHAM – Blackjack Mulligan (Robert Windham) has had two sons, Barry and Kendall, follow in his footsteps as a major wrestling star. Barry currently wrestles in the WWF

as The Widow Maker. Daughter Wendi has wrestled as both The Lock and Wenona Little Heart. Mike Rotunda is the son-in-law of the family.

YOUNGBLOOD – Chris and Mark (real last name Romero) are the sons of former pro wrestler Ricky Romero, who also used the ring name Ricky Youngblood. An older brother, Steve Romero, who wrestled as Jay Youngblood, died in 1985 of a heart attack.

PRO WRESTLING '89 FROM A TO Z

By Paul Hanlin, Jr.

A – For Andre the Giant, the Anabolic Warrior and the AWA, three things I'd like to see less of in 1990

B – For Bush League, where Vince McMahon, Carlos Colon, Verne Gagne, Hulk Hogan and Dusty Rhodes would make an all-star team. What a better place wrestling would be without them.

C – For the now-defunct Continental Wrestling Federation, which in 1988 was the country's best small promotion.

D – For the fans of Section D at the Dallas Sportatorium, who livened up World less-than-no Class wrestling this past spring.

E – For The Great Eric Embry. Ask him how great he is and he'll tell you. And if you boo him or any of his fellow babyfaces, he'll be quick to show you the exit.

F – For Freddy, Jason and the various other monster types that dropped by Memphis last year. Also for the Frankenstein, the craziest move in the sport.

G – For Guns'n'Roses. Don't laugh. Both the Steiners and the UWF's Shigeo Miyato used their smash hit, "Welcome to the Jungle," as their entrance music. See, music and wrestling can mix.

H – For Hulk Hogan. Wrestler and movie star. Is there no end to what Mr. Bollea can do? What's more, will we even care in five years?

I – For I, as in I think there are way too many pay-per-view events. Also for the ICW, which must be a swell place to work, what with Paul E. Dangerously bugging out halfway through their TV taping and when one of the Savoldis quits a promotion that is owned by the Savoldis.

J – For Japan, the only place wrestling is treated as a sport.

K – For Killing, just the talk of such from Wahoo McDaniel and Superclash III and Eric Embry during his feud with Scandor Akbar, further reinforcing wrestling's image as wholesome family entertainment.

L – For the letters section of the Observer. Jon Karesh, in the 5/1 issue for his to-a-T description of the WWF. In the comedy division, Ernie Santilli's letter about Jake Roberts in the 8/14 issue. I wouldn't doubt his Wrestlemania VII main event comes true, either.

M – For the word Million. We still have a Million Dollar Man. Now we have seven Million dollar gates.

N – For the NWA. Also for the term no-show, which were 1989's most prevalent tag team. Not a week went by when we didn't read about no-shows at NWA house matches. Luckily, it has improved since the beginning of the year, but it hasn't been so great as of late.

O – For the Oakland 2. I was even considering them for tag team of the year. They did more to worry the WWF than the NWA could do in 1989.

P – For Portland, the best regional promotion in the United States in 1989. Also for my favorite phrase, "Card subject to change."

Q – For this question. Can you hang on. Only nine more letters to go.

R – For the Rasslin' Radio talk show in Philadelphia. The host summed up the news for the week of Dec. 3 as "slow." That was the very week that the UWF set the all-time live gate record for a pro wrestling event. If that's a slow week, what, pray tell, is a fast one.

S – For Satoru Sayama II -- Jushin Riger. For those who missed out on the original, he's one hell of a sequel.

T – For Titan Sports. Also for Tokyo Dome. Vince has a date there on April 13. Baba, Maeda and Sakaguchi should be worried when he unleashes the most awaited match of the year, The Bushwackers vs. Rougeaus.

U – For U-Cosmos, pro wrestling's most smashing live financial success ever. This mark may stand forever. Also for the promotion that put it together, the UWF.

V – For Victory. Jack Victory. Wrestling's premier man of many faces. He's been a Secret Service agent, a Super Destroyer, a Russian Assassin among others this year alone. Truly amazing.

W – For the word Wrestling. If you are Vince McMahon, you try to avoid ever showing this to your audience.

X – Sorry folks, can't come up with anything.

Y – For Y, as in Y does the WWF push Dino Bravo?

Z – For Zeus, the one thing I wish I had seen less of in 1989.

THE RANDOM MARC PRESENTS A FICTIONAL EXCERPT OF A FUTURE NWA TELECAST

Bob Caudle: "The Observer year-end awards certainly contain a lot of surprises."

Jim Ross: "I think you're exactly right Bob. Who would have thought Terry Funk would be rookie of the year?"

Bob Caudle: "I think a lot of people were just seeing him for the first time and got confused, Jim. I myself voted for Gorgeous Gary Young. It's kind of a tradition in my family. But I still don't see how the Dynamic Dudes captured Best Heel Tag Team. I thought they were faces, Jim."

Jim Ross: "Well, they do seem to be the only wrestlers in the NWA who get more jeers than cheers. But I hadn't realized this ability of theirs was internationally recognized."

Bob Caudle: "I wonder what Gordon thinks about all this Jim."

Jim Ross: "Well, I don't, Bob. He'll probably just have his usual superficial analysis masquerading as incisiveness. But let's go now, fans. to his highness, the Dean of Wrestling announcers, pro wrestling's premier journalist, the leader of the over-the-hill gang, the man who..."

Gordon Solie: "Cool it, Ross. Hi fans. Walter Solie here with the Wrestling News Network."

Bob Caudle: "I thought his name was Gordon, Jim."

Jim Ross: "It was, Bob."

Gordon Solie: "Silence on my set. That's better. Okay fans. On with the news. The Wrestling Observer year end awards are out and frankly, I don't see why anyone should care."

Bob Caudle: "I guess he noticed he didn't win Announcer of the year, Jim."

Jim Ross: "I think you're exactly right, Bob."

Gordon Solie: "And finally, if I may, a personal note."

Jim Ross: "Huh, what happened to his news report, Bob?"

Gordon Solie: "You were talking and you missed it, Ross. I'm Walter Solie. Back to you, Yapper."

Jim Ross: "We're going to talk to some of the wrestlers, fans and see what they think of the awards."

Bob: "Good idea, Jim, let's start with..."

Lex Luger: "Me. Let's start with Me. I'm bigger than the game, Jim Ross."

Jim Ross: "Okay, Flex, let's start with you."

Lex Luger: "You may address me as Mr. Package, Ross."

Jim Ross: "Do I have to?"

Lex Luger: "Only if you want to live."

Jim Ross: "That's good enough for me, Mr. Package."

Lex Luger: "Listen to me all you low-lives out there who wish you could be Lex Luger."

Ric Flair: "No one wants to be Lex Luger, Pal. You're just another steroid freak who watched me and learned something about a dramatic ring presence."

Lex Luger: "I've had enough of you, you son of a gynecologist. Let's take it to the ring. Right here. Right now."

Ric Flair: "You've got it, pal."

Jim Ross: "It's getting real physical here in the NWA, fans. Let's try and get a microphone to the ring. They seem to be screaming at each other."

Ric Flair: "Less filling."

Lex Luger: "Tastes great."

Jim Ross: "That reminds me, fans. We'd like to welcome a new sponsor here on TBS...Ouch! What a chop! The champ is down. Here comes Gary Hart. Here comes Muta. Here comes Sawyer. Flair is being quadruple teamed. Wait. Here comes Eddie Gilbert. Here comes Missy Hyatt. Here comes Paul E. Dangerously. They're all pounding on Flair. Here comes Jim Crockett, George Scott and Dusty Rhodes."

Bob Caudle: "It's a bad night for the champ, Jim."

Jim Ross: "We've just heard that Sting, Pillman, The Road Warriors and Steiners have been bound and gagged in the locker room, fans."

Bob Caudle: "I have to think this was planned, Jim."

Jim Ross: "Wait a minute. Here they come. They're cleaning the ring. Thank God."

Bob Caudle: "What took them so long, Jim? I was really worried for a minute. All I can say is thank heavens for the Ding Dongs."

Jim Ross: "We're out of time, fans. Tune in next year."

Bob Caudle: "Where's the awards dinner being held, Jim?"

Jim Ross: "I heard he rented the parking lot at McDonald's. Should be quite a banquet."

Bob Caudle: "I can't wait, Jim. Are we off the air.?"

THE TEN GREATEST MATCHES OF THE DECADE THAT NEVER TOOK PLACE

By Chris Zavis

The first goal of every wrestling promotion is to make a profit. As in most businesses, the most direct way to do this is to give the consumer what they want. This, in wrestling, usually means the BIG MATCH. Both casual and hardcore fans are continually speculating as to who is going to wrestle on the next major card or what would happen if the latest two big names ever met.

Elsewhere in this Yearbook, you will find a list of the best matches of the decade. Most of them were the "big match" at that time. But what about those dream matches which never quite were. The bouts the fans wanted to see but for a variety of reasons, were never booked?

In selecting these matches, I gave equal weight to both North American and Japanese matches. While tag team matches are included, the list is heavily in favor of singles matches. Some of these matches were not to be because of the high walls erected by the various individual promotions. Others, due to internal promotional politics. In one case, they combine grapplers from two different ends of the decade. I

wonder how many of these ten would have been on the 100 best list if they had actually taken place.

1. HULK HOGAN VS. RIC FLAIR

Once upon a time, not too long ago, WWF champion Bob Backlund met NWA champion Harley Race in the squared circle. This was in the pre-Vince McMahon Jr. era and the chances of a match-up like this ever happening again are slimmer than an anorectic in Ethiopia. Since Vince McMahon's very philosophy totally excludes the very existence of anyone outside of his promotion, this bout never had any real chance of happening. But no dream match of the 80s garnered more speculation than this one. You could probably fill a football stadium with tickets upscaled accordingly. The financial gross would be staggering. With proper long-term build-up, the media spotlight could be blinding.

But of all the matches on this list, this is the one I'm most thankful for never having happened. The reason why should be obvious to a serious fan. If Ric Flair ever were to wrestle Hulk Hogan, it would be under two very tight restrictions.

First, Flair would have to leave the NWA and sign with Titan, making him totally under their control. Second, Flair would have to sell everything just short of his soul and do a major job for the Hulkster.

This match nearly happened in 1983. Flair was NWA champion and one of his stomping grounds was St. Louis. Hogan was the leading attraction in Verne Gagne's AWA. Gagne also owned 25 percent of the NWA St. Louis promotion and frequently sent Hogan to appear on the cards. However, by the time they had groomed Hogan for an NWA title shot, Flair had lost the title to Harley Race (trivia note: Hogan won the match via DQ in the first one fall NWA title match ever in St. Louis because Hogan wouldn't agree to do the job for a fall) By the time Flair regained the title, Hogan was packing his bags for New York.

Would it be a good match? A great match? The popular belief is that Flair could carry anybody to a good match. Even the greenest of no-talent rookies, from Mike Von Erich to Hiroshi Wajima came off looking good against Flair. Even though Hogan usually shows only a fraction of Flair's energy and ability, he is far from being without talent. He once was a decent worker who could work a decent match on a regular basis. With Flair calling the bout, it would probably be a four-star match.

2. ROAD WARRIORS VS. STAN HANSEN AND BRUISER BRODY

Unlike Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan, the two monster tag teams of the decade both worked together for Giant Baba's All Japan promotion. There were times they were in the country at the same time and worked on the same card. But, for many reasons, this match never took place.

Both teams built an image on the exact same ring formula. Kick the daylights out of your opponent for 90 percent of the match and don't sell. While Brody and Hansen did change the formula when matched against the man who signed their All Japan paychecks (Baba), they rarely sold much for anyone else. The Road Warriors sold a bit more, especially on the big shows, but also held fast to the image of invincibility.

It has been said that Bruiser Brody refused to get into the ring with the Warriors on more than one occasion, both in the United States and Japan. If that is true, it was probably due to his understanding of their mutual appeal and very similar styles and knowing that such a match would never really work. It is a match that nobody would win and neither would lose. But the box office would have been huge for such a clash. The ending would have to have been the mandatory double count out as well four men brawl throughout the arena. The bell continues to wildly ring, hundreds of fans scatter overturned chairs in their wake, and the juice flows freely all the way to the dressing room.

3. ANTONIO INOKI VS. AKIRA MAEDA

Of the ten non-bouts, this one came the closest to reality. In fact, it was actually booked, only to be changed to a 10-man elimination tag team match.

The match would have been a classic. In one corner, Inoki, the charismatic star of the 70s and 80s. The rock around which a successful promotion was built. A living legend in Japan who himself was something of a young rebel at one time. In the other corner, Akira Maeda. The James Dean of Japanese wrestling. Maeda, the master of "strong style" wrestling and the acknowledged heir to Inoki as the superstar of the New Japan promotion. The only thing that separated the two was the calendar. Inoki wanted to keep postponing the day when he handed the reins over to new blood. Both

Tatsumi Fujinami and Kengo Kimura were groomed as Inoki's successor, only to be jilted by the boss. Maeda wanted the top spot at once, or at least within a very short period of time. Neither was willing to sacrifice or even compromise their legend for the other or for the promotion.

The cancellation of that announced match was probably the single biggest promotional error Inoki ever made. If he had gone through with it and put Maeda over, the hottest promotion in the world today would have been New Japan. Maeda would be World champion and Inoki would have a huge bank account to soothe his bruised ego.

But the wrong decision was made. Maeda heads the hottest promotion in the world, the UWF. He has all the glory plus the fat bank account. As for Inoki, despite his political success and brief success with the Soviet team gimmick, he is still looking for someone to rebuild his promotion around.

4. THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. THE FOOT LOOSE

The first three matches were picked for their impact and significance in the wrestling world. They would all mean big money and lots of public attention. Eaton & Lane against Kawada & Fuyuki probably wouldn't draw flies as a main event, but it was selected for hardcore fans.

For the last three years, Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane, along with Jim Cornette, were the best tag team in the world. They introduced countless innovations to the game and were involved in hundreds of superior matches. But just like in the American Old West, all aging gunfighters know that someday a younger and quicker hand will come along to blow them into the pages of history. That younger hand is The Foot Loose. It is Kawada and Fuyuki who are the best tag team in the world today. It is their moves that others steal and it is their matches that are now used as the standard for tag team excellence.

There was a very brief period in early 1989 when this match could have become a reality. Cornette and the Express quit during the George Scott reign at the NWA. There was talk of a Japanese tour, with speculation on an Express vs. Foot Loose match-up. But there was no tour. And soon after, the Express was back with the NWA and it was George Scott who was gone. The Foot Loose had to make due to lesser talents like Kroffat & Furnas, The Malenko brothers and the British Bulldogs.

But it would have been great. Double team moves and precise timing would dazzle the eye. Four guys selling like crazy with nobody holding back. They would have crammed 60 minutes worth of hot moves into 15 or 20 unbelievable minutes. It would have given Flair vs. Steamboat a real run for Match of the year.

5. RIC FLAIR VS. RANDY SAVAGE

Think back to the pre-WWF Randy Savage. The wild-eyed maniac who worked like a demon in the ring and combined it with psycho mic work. The Randy Savage of today is still good, but he is a sanitized version of the real thing. Now imagine Savage leaving Memphis in the mid-80s after the long feud with Jerry Lawler. Instead of taking that one-way trip to Connecticut, he goes to North Carolina instead. The NWA World champion awaits and the results would have put the 4th of July to shame. No doubt about it.

Imagine any kind of match you can come up with between the two. Texas Death matches. No DQ matches. Lumber-jack matches. Cage matches. I Quit matches. Take your pick and the possibilities are wonderful. Imagine the

interviews and the crazy angles to set all of this up. Your mind can run rampant with the staggering possibilities.

Starrcade 1986. For the NWA title, Ric Flair vs. Randy Savage. Close your eyes and imagine that.

6. TATSUMI FUJINAMI VS. GENICHIRO TENRYU

Those same high promotional walls that have kept Flair and Hogan apart have Japanese versions. They separate the two best singles wrestlers in Japan for the decade of the 80s—Tatsumi Fujinami and Genichiro Tenryu. Both men are masters of their craft, have superior ability and are flawless technicians. The careers of both men are so similar they could be thought of as clones of each other. Both started out at about the same time and were quickly destined for superstardom. But both were held back, moving slowly up the promotional ladder a hard fought rung at a time. They only made it to the top in the late 80s, and in Fujinami's case, it didn't last very long.

Like Ric Flair, they can virtually carry anyone to a good match. They do so without a lot of flashy high spots but with a total command of what makes good wrestling. In American sports, they would be the counterpart to Larry Bird.

A Fujinami vs. Tenryu match would be the Japanese equivalent to the Flair vs. Steamboat series. There would not be a lot of flashy spots that would cause you to constantly rewind and slow-mo your VCR, but it would be a long, intense match that would be savored many times over the years.

Several times we nearly got it. Both men have leaked hints of jumping to their rival promotion but in the end, stayed with their home outfits. Even now, Inoki is attempting to get Tenryu for the Tokyo Dome show and barring bad health, Fujinami would be the obvious opponent.

7. RIKI CHOSHU VS. AKIRA MAEDA

On November 19, 1987, in a six-man tag team match in Tokyo, Riki Choshu had his patented scorpion death lock firmly in place on Osamu Kido. To break the submission, Akira Maeda stormed across the ring, approached Choshu on his blind side, and gave him a hard karate kick to the face, breaking two bones underneath his eye. The blow was not worked, but rather a "shoot kick" designed to injure his opponent. It was this misdeed that gave rebirth to the Japanese UWF, currently the hottest wrestling promotion in the world.

In Japan, "shooting," is like an aphrodisiac to hardcore fans. Maeda's kick became the most discussed thing in wrestling circles in almost ten years. Since it came at the very start of the annual tag team tournament, Inoki had to scramble to put the pieces back together again for the tournament to salvage his traditionally biggest month of the year. We will probably never know the entire story of what went on behind-the-scenes afterwards, but most reports went something like this.

Inoki was willing to re-instate Maeda providing he did a form of public penance. He was to wrestle Riki Choshu in a big match and do the job for him. This would, at once, re-establish the credibility Choshu lost in the incident and take Maeda down a peg in the eyes of the Tokyo wrestling fans. In addition, Maeda would also have to wrestle Inoki and do a job for him. Maeda walked out of New Japan and several months later took two of Inoki's rising young stars and started the UWF.

If peace could have been restored, Choshu vs. Maeda would have done record business. Every promotion in the world

connives and conspires to create the kind of heat and an angle that New Japan had been given on a silver platter. Combined with the air of legitimacy that the grudge match would have, public interest would have carried the match to one of great interest to the general public.

The match itself would have drawn unbelievable heat. It probably would have been exceptional, since Choshu saves his best work for the major cards and Maeda wasn't going to do the job without putting on a performance. He might have to lose, but he'd have to give his fans something to remember in the loss. But Inoki's price was too high for Maeda to pay and the match never took place. And now, Maeda is laughing all the way to the bank.

These two did meet once in a singles match, back in 1983 before Maeda had achieved superstardom. Choshu won the match with his scorpion death lock.

8. BRUISER BRODY VS. STAN HANSEN

In wrestling, the hottest feuds which draw long-term big money are those involving former partners who turn on each other. Bruiser Brody and Stan Hansen were considered as the best tag team in the world by the Japanese fans who had watched them for the better part of the decade. The longer they performed together, the more intensity and money there would be in an eventual feud. Both men held out against such a pairing until November 22, 1987, when Baba paired the two against each other on opposite tag teams in his tournament. While the match was without serious incident and something of a letdown to the fans, everyone knew where it would eventually wind up.

Where it did wind up was on a marble slab in Puerto Rico. Brody and Hansen never did wrestle one another in Japan due to Frank Goodish's murder at the hands of Jose Gonzales. Making matters even worse, Gonzales would get off scott-free and return to the ring, as a hero and crowd favorite.

If the match had taken place, they both would have probably sold well for each other, allowing liberties to be taken with their image that they wouldn't allow other wrestlers. Lots of the match would take place outside the ring, with the crowd creeping back to witness the carnage. Brody's chain and Hansen's bull rope would have been well employed and some furniture would have definitely been moved. Eventually the feud would burn itself out in Japan and the two would do the same feud for American audiences, much the same way Brody had done with Abdullah the Butcher.

9. TATSUMI FUJINAMI VS. RIC FLAIR

The two major U.S. promotions have had working relationships with the major Japanese promotions for most of the decade. The NWA worked with Giant Baba's All Japan promotion while the WWF worked with Antonio Inoki's New Japan office. This latter relationship broke down in 1985 and is now non-existent. However, no re-alignment has taken place. Because of this, two of the most talented wrestlers in history have never wrestled one another.

As discussed in other non-bouts, both Flair and Fujinami are flawless technicians who have fully mastered their craft. They have good or superior matches with almost any kind of opponent. When they get the opportunity to wrestle equally talented foes, the results are impressive. They hardly ever get to wrestle anyone of their own skill level since there are very few who can match them. Just look over the annual Observer ratings each year and the names of Flair and Fujinami are the only two to continually appear in the top ten.

A match between the two would be on the level of the 1989 Steamboat vs. Flair matches. It would have the same potential for excellence that Fujinami vs. Tenryu or Flair vs. Savage would have. Both men are consummate professionals who are used to working and making their opponent look good.

As 1989 closes, the NWA and New Japan are negotiating a deal. Even then, New Japan would only get a few name stars and only on a very sporadic basis. Would this include Flair as a regular, if he were to stay World champion? And even if all that comes to pass, Fujinami's career is threatened by a major back injury that has kept him out of action for more than six months. There is serious talk he won't be able to come back.

Flair vs. Fujinami has never been booked in the past and will probably never take place in the future.

10. SATORU SAYAMA VS. MITSUHARA MISAWA

In any profession, there are those who possess unique gifts. The kind of talent that allows them to achieve heights that others can only dream about. Even rarer than this are those who combine those special talents with a burning desire to excel at all phases of what they do. They go beyond greatness and become legendary.

In pro wrestling, there are many greats, but few of what I would term genuine legends. Lou Thesz qualifies in every respect. So does Ric Flair. Satoru Sayama, the original Tiger Mask, is also on that very short list.

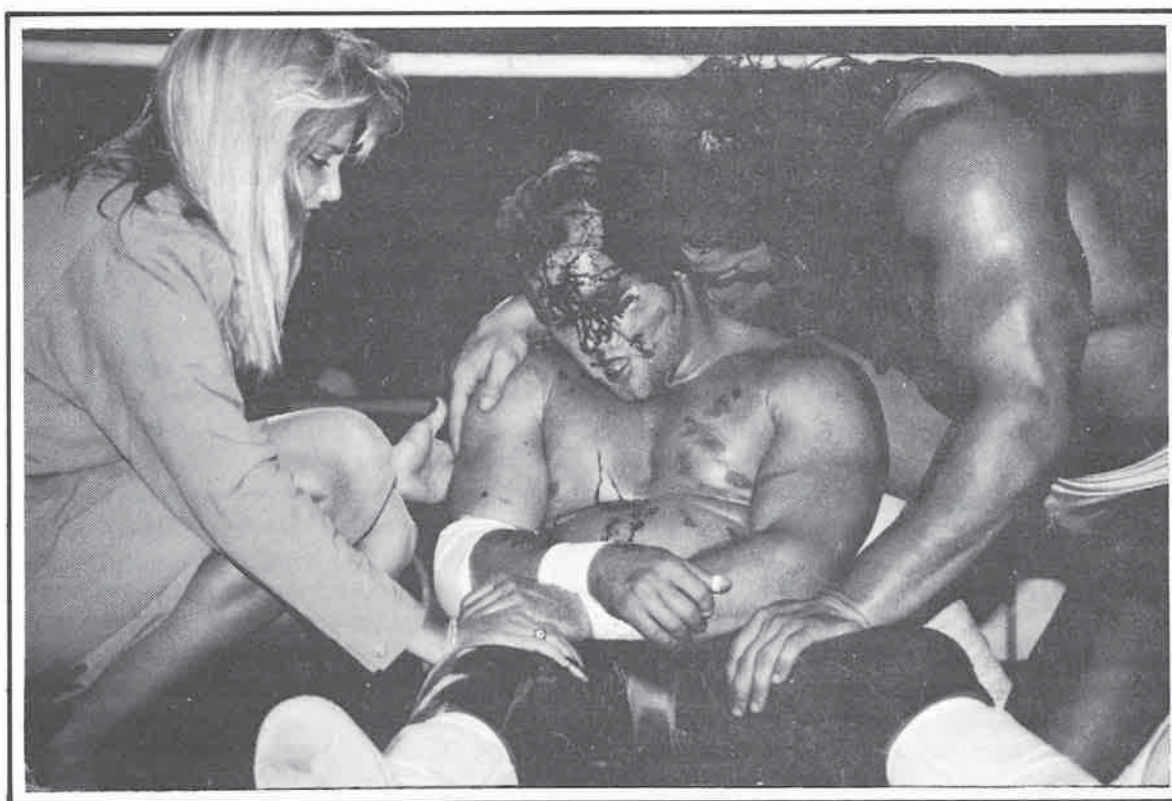
What makes Sayama so amazing is the very short amount of time he competed. From 1981 to 1983 Sayama donned a hood and wrestled as the children's cartoon hero, Tiger Mask. There is not enough space here to fully do justice to his talents. You would need a whole book for that. Suffice to say that Sayama perfected the acrobatic high spot style which

has been copied by junior heavyweights in Japan since that time. He attempted ring dives that defied personal injury. He brought more crowds to their feet than any other wrestler at the time. There are plenty of wrestlers in Japan and Mexico who can execute flashy dives, but Sayama went beyond the theatrics and combined all around technical excellence that rivalled Flair and Fujinami. He could work a match to perfection, bring out the best in his opponent and his suplexes were a thing of beauty.

In mid-1983, he retired. A year later, he joined the UWF and adopted a completely different style of wrestling. He rejected the flashy high spots in favor of realistic mat wrestling and kicks. Sayama did this with the same degree of excellence that he performed while doing the acrobatic style. After a bitter dispute over the direction of the UWF, Sayama retired and has not wrestled since professionally.

All Japan bought the rights to the Tiger Mask character in 1984 and tapped a young prelim junior heavyweight to wear the stripes. Mitsuha Misawa got the nod, as the decision came down to him and Shiro Koshinaka. Anyone trying to replace Sayama as Tiger Mask would constantly be compared with something that couldn't be equalled. But it didn't take fans long to realize Misawa was doing things in the ring that even Sayama had never attempted. His dive over the top rope, into a flip, landing on his opponents chest on the arena floor never failed to get people on their feet. Despite the acrobatics, Misawa didn't become a complete wrestler until 1988, when he combined his high flying maneuvers with enough wrestling ability to consistently have excellent matches.

If you could play with time and manipulate the calendar, have the 1982 Tiger Mask vs. 1988 Tiger Mask. Sayama vs. Misawa, with both at their peak. There would be so much flying in this one that the match should be held in an airplane hangar. If there is pro wrestling is heaven, this match would be the main event.



LUCHA LIBRE: AN OVERVIEW OF RUDOS AND TECNICOS

By Kurt Brown
Editor, Viva La Lucha

For many years, professional wrestling has been an underestimated piece of culture in both Mexico and the United States. Each country can proudly boast of a tradition of wrestling heroes over a number of decades. The United States has Strangler Lewis, Lou Thesz and Terry Funk. Mexico has Charro Aguayo, El Santo and Mil Mascaras. Both countries have separate legends, different approaches to ring work and a different degree of public popularity. Despite these differences, wrestling fans in both countries have had ample opportunity to see each other's legends for many years. In the past decade, however, the two styles appear to have become more segregated than ever before. Mexico seems to have had very few quality wrestlers from the United States tour their country in recent years. On our end, in the United States, the book of top Mexican stars who tour this country seems to be almost an empty book. With this in mind, let's take a look at "Lucha Libre."

The literal translation for the words, "Lucha Libre" would be "Free Fight." The term is actually Spanish for "wrestling," and in regards to professional wrestling, has been around since 1933. Mexico's first heavyweight champion was Francisco "Charro" Aguayo. Aguayo won the championship by defeating Manuel Hernandez on June 21, 1934. Charro Aguayo was not only the first recognized champion in Mexico, but also the first wrestler to evolve into the category of legendary. Lucha Libre was in its infancy in 1934, and has since become a tradition in Mexico.

These early years of Lucha Libre saw quite a few wrestlers build the character and presence of Mexico's newest trend. The style of wrestling used in Mexico at that time was more similar to American style than it is today. Like wrestling in the U.S. was at the time, the wrestling action was tight and almost entirely on the mat. Among the wrestlers who were popular in these early years were Rolando Vera, Rito Romero, and the early 40s saw the dawning of Mexico's greatest bad man, Rodolfo "Cavernario" Galindo.

Cavernario (Caveman) Galindo had a wild head of coarse hair, long before lengthy hair was acceptable in wrestling, and an innately hostile face. For years he had an ongoing feud with Mexico's favorite heroes, El Santo and The Blue Demon. He wielded my personal favorite foreign object ever, Jalapeno peppers! He used these by biting into them and rubbing the hot juice into his opponents' eyes. Although this is not a documented fact, it could be assumed that Galindo pioneered the style that today's Lucha Libre fans know as "rudo" (meaning rough or rude).

The style known as "rudo" is similar to the "heel" in the United States. In Mexico, the "rudo" is not simply someone with a nasty disposition, but a wrestler who uses an unorthodox brand of wrestling. A rudo is accepted as a style used in the ring, as opposed to somebody who is generally a nasty human being.

On the other side of the fence are the "tecnicos," or technical wrestlers. They rely on fancy mat work and aim to combat the brawling style of the rudos. The best rudos in Mexico are Emilio Charles, Jr., Pirata Morgan and Negro Casas. The only drawback to these rudos are that they don't always show their best ability when in the rudo mode. However, there are occasions when a rudo will wrestle an occasional match as a full-fledged tecnico. The explanation for this change of style is for the rudo to show that he is not limited to brawling, and can display his versatility. Often this will happen in a championship match, and these are occasions where you

can often see Lucha Libre at its finest. The most recent match of this sort took place in Tijuana in the fall when Negro Casas & Blue Panther abandoned their rudo-like ways and wrestled El Hijo Del Black Shadow & Ciclón Ramirez in a match described as the best one in Tijuana in 1989.

No country can boast that it has a greater abundance of wrestling masks than Mexico. Masked stars in the United States seem to be a fad one day and out of fashion the next. But the mask has always been an important piece of Lucha Libre in regards to both its history and contemporary style. Mexico features masked wrestlers from preliminaries to main eventers. Each wrestler has his own unique identity. Names of the masked men have ranged from the simple, "Mascara Roja," which means "Red Mask," to the creative, "Tierra, Viento y Fuego," which means, "Earth, Wind and Fire," which isn't a tag team, but the name of a masked wrestler.

Other masks with a creative touch in recent years have been Alcatraz (his mask is black with white trim in the shape of prison bars which surround his eyes and mouth), Halloween (Orange mask with green trim in the design of a pumpkin), El Matematico (The Mathematician, white mask with numerals plastered all over), Ultraman #1 and #2 (remember the Japanese super hero? These masks are identical, only in a solid silver color) and Super Astro (silver mask with stars surrounding the eyes and mouth. On the forehead is a shooting star).

Also unique is that frequently the mask of a wrestler does not disappear upon the wrestler's retirement. This past decade saw the emergence of several second generation masked wrestlers. Masked legends such as Black Shadow, Blue Demon, Huracán Ramirez, Ángel Blanco, Dr. Wagner and Rayo de Jalisco all have had sons who have opted to follow in their famous father's footsteps. Most use their father's ring name, with the words El Hijo De (meaning "The Son of") beforehand with the exception of Ciclón Ramirez. With an older brother who already uses the Huracán name, the second brother became a Cyclone! Both Ramirez sons are lighter wrestlers who have a great degree of ring talent, as does El Hijo de Blue Demon, who is often called Blue Demon Jr. No list of masked father-and-son combinations in Mexico would be complete without making mention of Mexico's most famous wrestler ever, El Santo, along with his son El Hijo Del Santo.

El Santo (The Saint) donned his mask in 1942 and his popularity took off with great intensity. Throughout the 50s, his feuds with Cavernario Galindo and Blue Demon (before they later became tag team partners) were the biggest drawing matches in Mexico. The feud with Blue Demon frequently saw the two vying for the World Welterweight title, which changed hands between the two often. Santo's popularity escalated even farther when he was transformed into a movie star in a three part movie serial entitled, "El Santo vs. The Diabolic Brain." The movie was a hit and the result was a series of more than 35 suspense movies featuring El Santo in the leading role.

The mask of El Santo was always a potential trophy for Mexico's leading rudos, but it never left his face. His son began wrestling in 1983 with a mask identical to his father's. The senior Santo finally retired from Lucha Libre that same year, but continued to make frequent appearances with his mask in public. In February, 1984, he was entertaining at a night club, and was stricken with a fatal heart attack and died shortly after.

The funeral of El Santo was covered extensively in both wrestling and regular news publications. The public funeral saw several thousand Santo admirers come to pay their respects. El Santo laid in an open casket, with his mask still on his face. One publication published a photo of El Hijo Del Santo being consoled by fellow wrestlers. El Hijo, like his father, was donning his mask at the funeral. The homage paid to Lucha Libre's most popular hero after his passing with exceptional. His tomb is marked simply, "El Santo, 1917-1984," and has a bust of El Santo planted in the wall directly above his epitaph.



Negro Casas

In regards to the present-day Mexican scene, there are currently four major promotions running regularly. They are the UWA, headed by the Maynes, the NWA, headed by Paco Alonso, the WWA, headed by Benjamin Mora, and the AWWA (promoter unknown). The leading promotion is the UWA, which features Fishman, Mil Mascaras and Pero Aguayo as its leading draws. Next in popularity is the NWA, which is the promotion many U.S. fans are familiar with as it appears on Galavision cable, with Lizmark, Pirata Morgan and Atlantis as the top stars. The WWA is the group that runs weekly in Tijuana, with its top draws being Rey Misterio and Konan. The AWWA is the least popular of the four, and is totally oriented toward young children. Cartoonish masked men such as Super Raton (Super Rat), Archie (yes, Jughead's pal), and Pinocho (Pinocchio) bring quite a surreal look at the Lucha Libre scene.

The major difference between these promotions and the promotions in the United States is that the hold on one's talent isn't nearly as tight a grip. In Mexico, while the major stars are usually committed to one promoter, as in the United States and Japan, the promotions often trade or loan out their talent to each other. While the top U.S. promotions keep a protective grip on their talent, talent is distributed frequently among the groups in Mexico.

As far as independent wrestling goes, the list is simply too huge to even get into. Probably every city has some form of independent group running. Every major city has at least one wrestling school. Descriptions of these schools are impressive, with a high number of students often present. With the high number of young men, some starting basic training as early as 12-years-old, trying to break into the business, the competition is intense. After successfully getting booked, many of the young independent wrestlers go out of their way to look impressive on their first small cards, with the pay usually being very small, in hopes of breaking into the high ranks of Lucha Libre.

Fans of wrestling in the United States and Japan have seen their share of trends and changes in the business. The longer you are a fan, the more often you will see pro wrestling evolve, be the evolution subtle or blatant. Japan saw a new trend in the late 70s when junior heavyweight wrestlers suddenly became the rage because of Tatsumi Fujinami. This went one step further in the early 80s when flying maneuvers were used in these junior heavyweight matches, brought on by the popularity of Satoru Sayama. The United States has a long standing tradition of champions like Lou Thesz and Terry Funk, whose versatile brands of wrestling in recent years have given ways to the Hulksters and Macho Men. Mexico has gone through its share of trends as well, and is currently at an interesting turning point.

Lucha Libre's early days began with the majority of wrestling action on the mat. During the 50s, wrestlers such as Black Shadow introduced flying maneuvers to compliment the wrestling holds. This became popular fast. Throughout the following decades, the flying action became faster and more frequently used. While this was popular in the eyes of many fans, traditionalists and the wrestlers themselves noticed that with the increase in flying, wrestling holds were being watered down or forgotten. Many of the older wrestlers in Mexico today are critical of the younger stars as they feel the flying is overemphasized now more than ever. They claim some of the wrestlers lack a general knowledge of "on the mat" wrestling. The fliers are not universally frowned upon by the traditionalists, however. Two of Mexico's finest flyers, Atlantis and Super Astro, are generally acknowledged as being men who have earned their wings by incorporating a lot of wrestling with their airborne maneuvers.

The tide of change in Lucha Libre is here once again. In recent years, the young guns of Lucha Libre haven't been content to simply emulate holds they've seen in the local arenas. Many of the younger wrestlers study videotapes of wrestling in the United States and Japan. They then bring the aspects of those styles that impress them and blend them in with the traditional Lucha Libre style of Mexico. Just as Mozart made his name in music by having the guts to break the traditions and rules of music in his age, these men are bringing a new fire to Lucha Libre. Among these innovative newcomers are El Dandy, Apollo Dantes, Eddie Guerrero, and two wrestlers that fans in Southern California are familiar with, Negro Casas and Konan.

Breaking tradition immediately comes to mind when thinking of Negro Casas. There is the tradition, the saying, even the "rule," in the United States that only big men draw big gates at the arenas. Negro Casas and El Hijo Del Santo proved that rule wrong when they wrestled in a hair vs. mask match on July 18, 1987 at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. Both men weigh less than 170 pounds, and yet their main event drew more than 7,000 fans to the Olympic Auditorium, more than either the NWA or WWF were drawing at the time. This was doubly impressive because this was done without any local television and very little publicity elsewhere. Negro Casas is the son of former wrestler Pepe Casas and has two brothers who are also wrestling in Mexico. Casas looks great when in the ring with a top wrestler, but also has the ability to make a match with a nobody seem interesting. Avid Lucha Libre fan Jeff Larson put it aptly after seeing Casas in a match on a spot show in San Bernadino, "Casas' opponent was a total bum, but Casas had enough charisma just standing in the ring to save the match." Usually a rudo, Casas goes from having the presence of a smart ass, wisecracking adolescent when he is having his way, to a passionate, angry, driven man when things go sour. He has a wide selection of moves, some of which many wrestlers say that he innovated himself. To see Casas wrestle as a tecnico is to see Casas at his best as he pulls off maneuvers that do not look humanly possible.

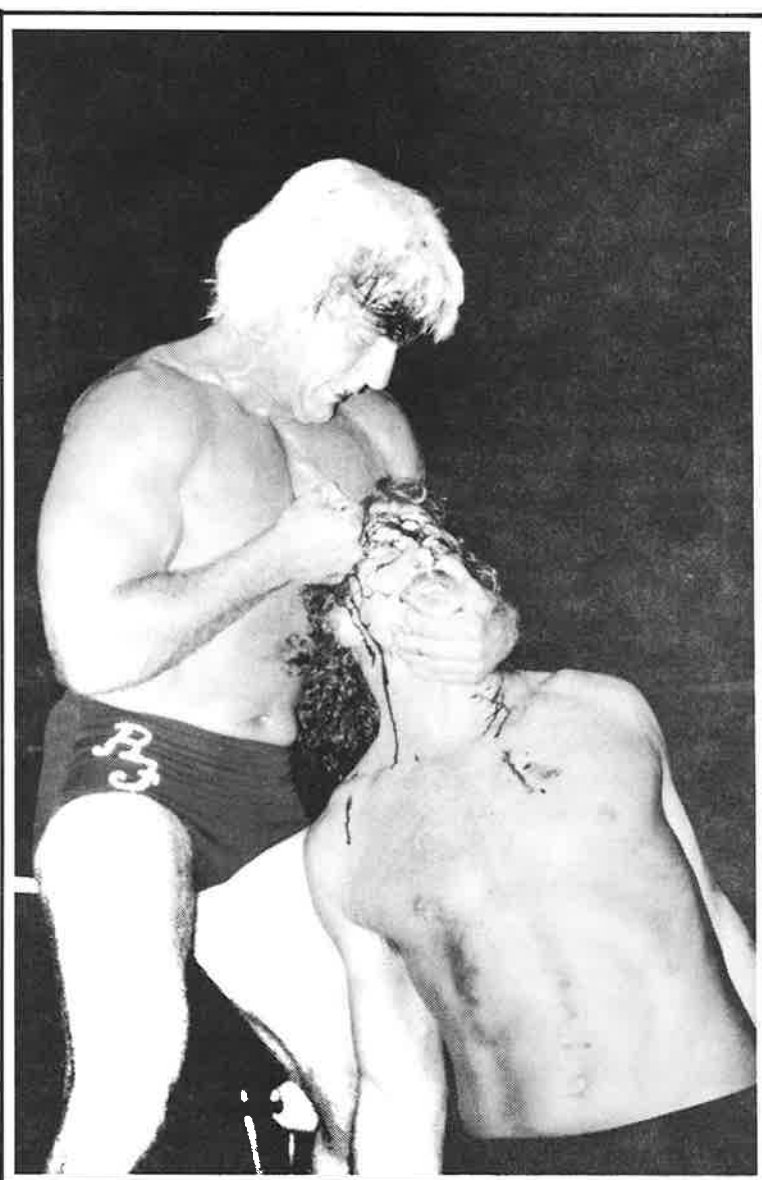
Masked wrestler Konan is a young star who, in addition to wrestling stints in Southern California and Calgary, has made a name for himself throughout Mexico in a short period of time. Breaking into the business less than two years ago, Konan is learning Lucha Libre quickly and it appears he's intent of bringing together more than just one style of wrestling. After main eventing throughout Mexico against

the likes of El Canek and Mil Mascaras, Konan has a good handle on Lucha Libre style. He is now venturing into American style. Along with the other young innovators throughout Mexico, Konan frequently displays moves inspired from different forms of wrestling he sees on videotape. In addition to using the traditional moves of the different wrestling styles, he has been coming up with moves never seen before, including some unorthodox suplexes.

One success story in Mexico right now is that of Super Muneco (Super Puppet). Super Muneco broke into the business in 1984 at the age of 19 and became a big star with the AWWA. Donning a mask that resembles a cartoon clown's face and brightly colored, loose fitting overalls, Super Muneco fit right in with the animated look of the AWWA. He was a hit along with Super Raton and Pinocho as a three-man team called "Los Idolos De Los Ninos" (The idols of children). When these comic strip wrestlers venture outside of the comic strip promotion cards and into the other major promotions in Mexico, they were not welcomed with open arms. Many of the wrestlers outside of the AWWA felt resentful toward the kiddie look and had little good to say

about anyone involved in that promotion. Super Muneco faced this dilemma. Apparently the puppet had a lot of determination to prove his detractors wrong and wanted to achieve the respect as a wrestler that the other AWWA wrestlers lack. In the past few years Muneco has abandoned some of his flashy moves for a more aggressive approach to Lucha Libre. In addition, his forehead is not pretty. He could easily gain Sheik Farhat's respect. While many of the traditional wrestlers despise Muneco's gimmick, they have admiration for him personally as a worker. While Muneco is hardly a Mexican version of Ric Flair, he is at least considered "one of the boys" in any promotion.

Much more could be written on aspects of Lucha Libre of which many of us are not familiar. I hope this provides as a sufficient introduction. The style is not everyone's cup of tea, but I urge the newly initiated Lucha Libre viewer to have patience to understand the unfamiliar features. "Like wine, one must develop a taste for Lucha Libre," is how Pat Hoed states it. That statement is on the money. Once you have taken the time to develop the taste, odds are that you will find Lucha Libre a fascinating extension of professional wrestling.



THE COMEBACK STORY OF 1989: THE RETURN OF TERRY FUNK

By Mark Madden

Author's note: This interview was conducted with Terry Funk for a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette story that ran in January. I didn't feel I could do Funk justice within a newspaper's limited space, so I asked Dave Meltzer if I could write a more lengthy version for the Observer yearbook.

Terry Funk's career as an active wrestler ended (for now) not as it should have, but as it had to within the framework of the National Wrestling Alliance booking. One of the greatest wrestlers of all-time submitted in front of the largest audience ever to see a pro wrestling match on cable television, then told Ric Flair that he was a hell of a man.

But, as I marvelled at the most intense wrestling match I'd ever seen at the NWA's New York Knockout card, I couldn't help but think when it was over that it should have been me, and each of you reading and everyone watching, telling Terry Funk that he was a hell of a man.

Terry Funk lived up to his vaunted reputation and then some nightly from the moment he did the sneak-attack angle with Flair at Wrestle War '89 in Nashville through the Baltimore Bash and Halloween Havoc until he reached the end of his personal road in Troy, New York.

And, in a still bigger testimony to his character, desire and work ethic, Funk proved it in dozens of house shows, combatting a broken back, a staph infection that nearly caused him to lose his arm, battered knees and the burden of 45 years of living and 24-years in pro wrestling working against him. He proved it under circumstances that would have caused most men to quit. In fact, most did, well before that point.

When I saw Terry Funk limp out of the Pittsburgh Civic Arena a few months back, it looked like very step might be his last. It looked like those knees were finally going to call it quits and deposit him on the asphalt. Moments like those make one realize how ironic the finish of Terry Funk's final match was. Terry Funk, quit? Maybe in wrestling booking fantasyland, perhaps. Never in real life.

And I don't think Terry Funk is through as an active wrestler even now. Not if a recent talk with him is any indication. This was retirement No. 3, don't forget. I think there will be a No. 4.

"Am I through with wrestling? Ah, who the hell knows? You people don't know what you want. Neither do I," rasped the voice that might best be described as an all-out drawl. "It's certainly not like I'm unable to compete anymore. I don't think there's any doubt I'm better than anyone they have.

But it might be time to move on. I'm going to give announcing a try. If it doesn't work out, I'd consider wrestling again. I never said I was quitting forever. I'm just not active as a wrestler right now."

Never say never with Terry Funk. The thought of him making an NWA comeback after years away from the United States mainstream seemed ludicrous to most fans who never saw him in his prime, but only remembered him as some sort of a memory in his Mel Phillips-bashing WWF days.

Yet, earlier this year in Florida revealed that not only did Funk still have the competitive fire, but he still had the ability. He even made a feud with Dusty Rhodes seem exciting, as he sprayed cellulite splinters all over the Dou-

ble-Cross ranch in Canyon, Tex., in his memorable chain saw interview.

On May 6, at Rhodes' Miami Homecoming, Funk performed his least-known but perhaps biggest miracle of 1989. He carried Dusty Rhodes to a 4 1/2 star match, confiding to an acquaintance beforehand that he was going to do it. That's the equivalent of Babe Ruth calling his shot in the 1932 World Series, then going up to plate with a whiffle ball bat.

Commenting on his ability to have a good match against anyone, Funk said, "There are a lot of guys who wrestle hard and have good matches most of the time. Lex Luger, Sting and Ric Flair in the NWA and even Ted DiBiase in the WWF.

The thing is, Ted doesn't always get matched against people he can have great matches with. I'm not sure I could have a good match if I had to wrestle Joe the Blob. Well, I probably could. Oh hell, sure I could."

As it turns out, the Rhodes miracle was just a portent of things to come. But, at the time, most people were skeptical that Funk was the man to be the NWA's new lead heel. At least until the next night--Wrestle War '89.

As Funk massacred Ric Flair following the latter's NWA title win over Ricky Steamboat, all doubts disappeared, at least from my head. Funk's performance throughout the entire pay-per-view was subtle, yet commanding, as he veered from distinguished ex-NWA champion to studious judge to raging madman. Incredibly, he drew intense heat in a matter of seconds.

And it wasn't cheap heat, either. He didn't get a Ric Flair-type heel reaction where half the fans are cheering; or a Rick Rude heel reaction where half the fans are laughing. He got true, venomous old-time heel heat with new-time fans. Not only was Funk wrestling's best heel in 1989, he was its only heel.

"You're right, I was the only one," said Funk. "I don't know if it's an art form to be a bad guy. I don't even know if I am a bad guy. My wife says I am, but every wife says that. I think I'm just an ornery bastard, a belligerent son-of-a-gun.

But I think the people respected me. They loved to hate me, but if you would put me against certain wrestlers, I think they'd love to love me.

But not too many would love to fight him.

Ask Hulk Hogan, who cowered in his hotel room in Japan while Funk was downstairs after finding out he'd lied to Japanese reporters about the results of a series of matches in Africa. But back to 1989.

While Ric Flair was "laid up" at home, contemplating retirement, Funk out-and-out stole the show in the NWA. Turning Flair babyface was no tough task. Fans had been aching to cheer him for years. But Funk's psychotic interviews and skits made this a true good vs. bad confrontation, something the NWA desperately needed on top after the mixed-up-role Flair vs. Steamboat feud. But before the revenge match could take place, it appeared the comeback was thwarted by a broken sacrum (tailbone) just a few scant weeks before the pay-per-view. But waiting for that injury to heal was never even considered.

Then came July 23 and the main event of the Baltimore Bash. A great match. It would have been Match of the Year had it occurred in 1988, but one which will get lost in the shuffle of great matches in 1989. The Flair-Funk match was a classic brawl and juicfest, well set up by the lack of blood to that point on the card. Stiff work, a few great high spots and an emotional tension that surpassed even the great Flair vs. Steamboat classic matches.

The comeback, at that point, was complete. Funk could have gone home to the Double-Cross Ranch and he would have accomplished what he had set out to do.

"I think my comeback accomplished letting people know what I already knew," Funk said. "That I'm the best. I think people realized that more and more as time has gone on.

"The only reason I came back was to prove to people that I could be on top again. I didn't do it because I had to. I've been very successful in many areas of life. I've been successful in my other sport, acting. I've been successful in business ventures. I have money. I don't have to worry about it.

"But preserving my place and my family's place in wrestling history was very important to me. I had an excellent career, was NWA champion and was in the WWF, but that was before the satellites were up and the pay-per-views had changed wrestling. I was well known in Texas and Florida, but not on a national level.

"Now, I've accomplished something. I think the people know that the Funks were pretty damn good. And I think they know that this one in particular is about the best wrestler they've ever seen."

Terry Funk wasn't finished on July 23rd. After a series of great nightly brawls with Flair, an early September staph infection became so severe that the doctors threatened amputation of the limb. Six weeks later he dominated the Halloween Havoc show, pushing his 45-year-old body so hard that we forgot the silly cage and watched him perform. Think of it, a ridiculous cage gimmick match designed to capture the fancy of those who think the WWF epitomizes pro wrestling, and in the same match with Ric Flair, and we watched a broken-down wrestler from another era who just wouldn't quit.

"Why do I work so hard every night?" Funk said. "Well, that's a simple question to answer. When there are 10,000 people out there to stimulate your adrenalism, it's a lot easier to work a good match. Well, some wrestlers even go through the motions on the pay-per-view cards, but I look at things differently.

"I started out working for damn near next to nothing in front of 15 or 25 people. Even after I hit the big time, there were nights we'd get crowds of 40 or 50 if there was a snowstorm or bad weather. But whether there's 10,000 people or 10 people, they all paid to be there and they deserve a good show.

"I have a great compassion for wrestling fans. I've been stabbed in the neck and leg. I've had to fight my way out of arenas. On this last run, a lady even came after me with a 12-inch knife. Our security guy happened to see her and stopped her and she said, 'If I was three feet closer I'd have killed that S.O.B.'

"But I've never pressed charges on a fan. All those people love wrestling. And I wouldn't feel I did my job if those people didn't hate Terry Funk more than anything else during that show. It's that important to me. It's the guy who says that I'm not an athlete that I want to punch in the nose."

Little did we know that the best was yet to come. November 15. New York Knockout. Flair vs. Funk. I Quit match.

I thought nothing could top the Flair vs. Steamboat match at the Chitown Rumble. But after a lot of rewinding and a lot of re-watching, I think this match did.

This was no brawl. This was a fight. An out-and-out knock-down, drag-out alley fight. The two best wrestlers, maybe of all-time, making it look as if they really ached for each other's blood. The intensity made the Baltimore match look like a senior citizen's bridge club meeting. A five-star wrestling match. A ten-star fight.

A young wrestling fan asked me a few days later if Terry and Ric were fighting for real. It look as real a fight as I've ever seen a pro wrestling match look.

"That was my best match of the past year," said Funk. "Wally Karbo, who has been around for years, told me that was the greatest wrestling match he had ever seen. People have come up to me on the streets and told me that. It was very, very physical, and I'm very pleased with it.

"When you've been wrestling for as long as I have been, you can't look at one match and say it was your best match ever. But that was a great match. What does it take to make a great match? Hell, I don't know. I just do 'em."

Ostensibly, that was the last match of Terry Funk's wrestling career. He's Chris Cruise's announcing partner now on the NWA's World Wide Wrestling program and with some hard work, he'll be very good at it. And nobody will have to talk Funk into working hard at anything.

But as far as great matches are concerned, could Terry Funk still do 'em? He says he could. Which makes me think he will.

"I gave all I had physically and more this past year," he said. But I still feel I could come back and give that kind of match. Will I come back? I don't know. But when the time comes that I feel like I can no longer give that type of match, then I'll retire for good. But right now, I still believe in myself.

"I don't think I'll be coming back. But who knows, you might see me punching someone in the nose on TV next week."

Here's hoping Terry Funk's fist again develops an insatiable appetite for someone's face. As the NWA considers replacing Ric Flair as World champion, and with no one of true World title caliber to take his spot, so should it consider whether it can afford to have someone as equally irreplaceable as Funk retire.

I've never enjoyed watching a pro wrestler as much as I enjoyed watching Funk this past year. In my estimation as a fan, nobody was even close to Ric Flair, but now I understand what Funk is all about. I'm convinced he and Flair are two of a kind. When it's time to take it easy, they both instead work harder.

When Dusty Rhodes was the Midnight Rider, he used to say that there was a little bit of Midnight Rider in all of us. Thank God that isn't true, or we'd all be getting weighed on truck scales, but after watching Funk, I'd like if there was a little bit of Terry Funk in me.

Having the integrity to work hard regardless of circumstances, wanting to do well for pride's sake, having the desire to do the best job rather than the easiest job, those are qualities

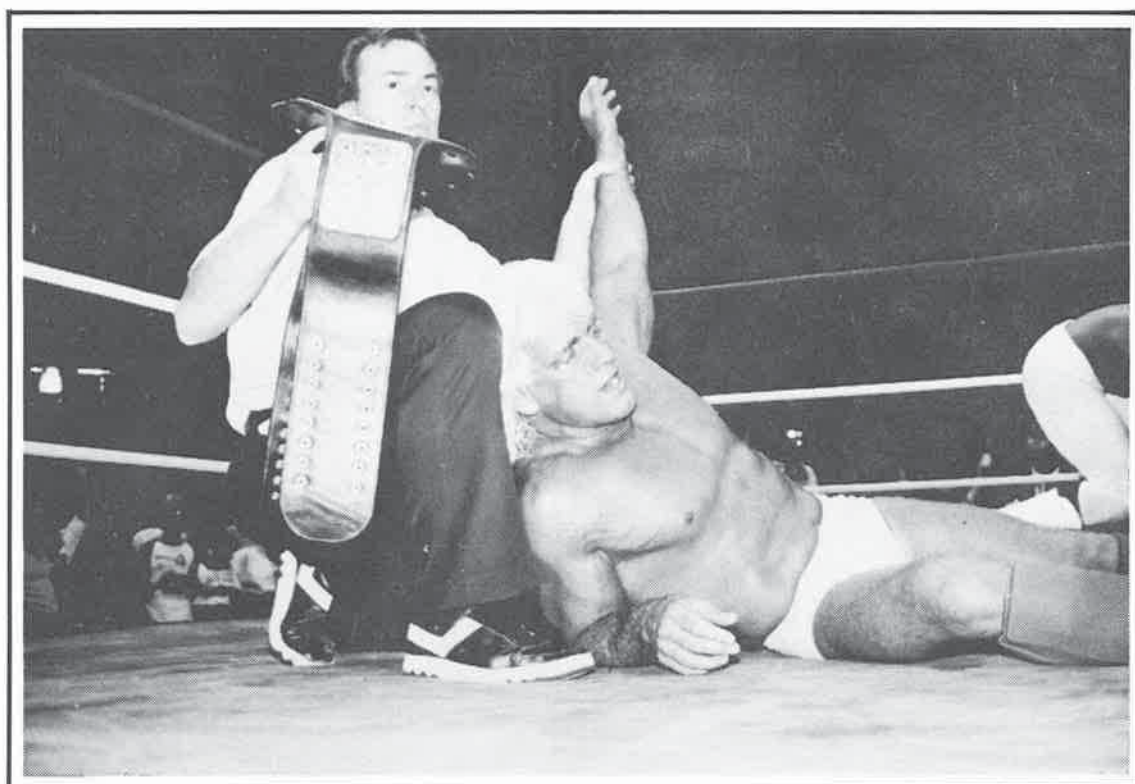
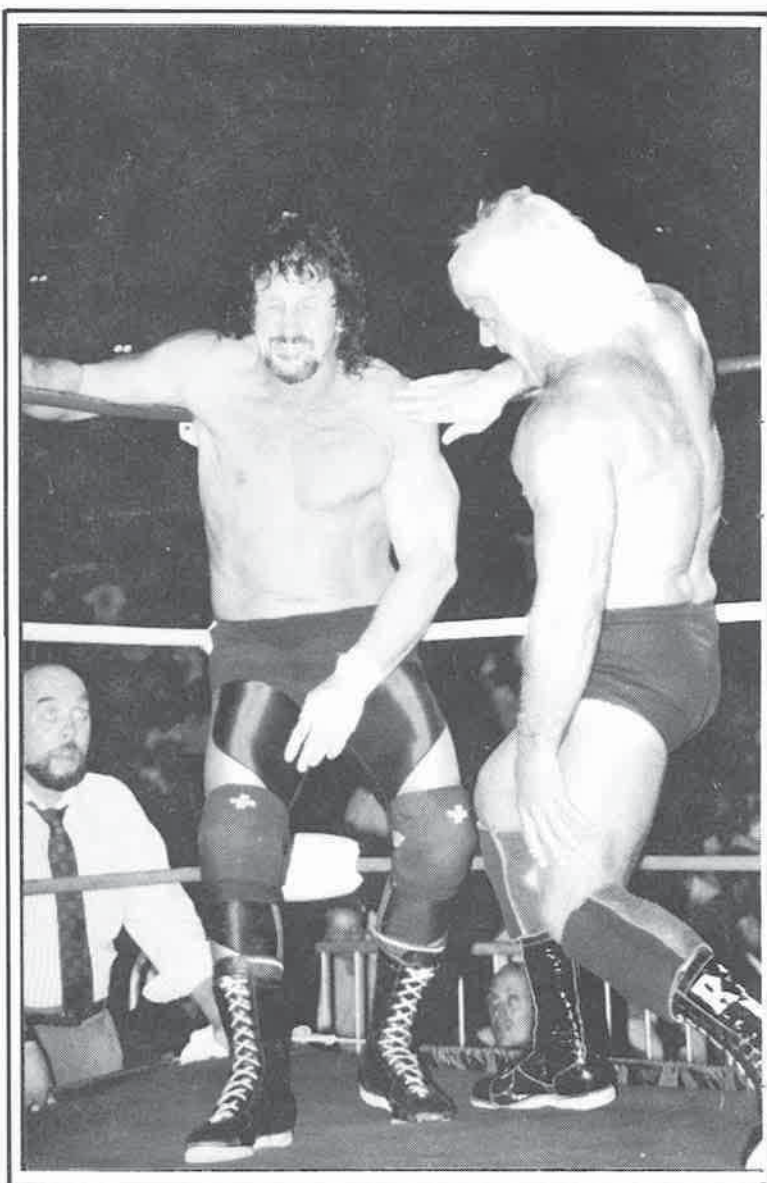
we all should strive for but qualities few people really have. There should be a little bit of Terry Funk in all of us.

"My daddy would have been very happy," Funk said about his comeback. I think he'd be proud to know that I could still be a big part of his business, even in this day and age. And damn it, if he were still here, he'd have wanted to be right in the middle of it. He'd have loved it.

"People will watch something like the Survivor Series or the Royal Rumble or maybe a big NWA show and say to themselves that something was missing. I know that something was missing."

What was missing was Terry Funk, one of the two best wrestlers of this era.

"If they say that, that makes me feel better than anything."



LOU THESZ LOOKS AT PRO WRESTLING TODAY AND YESTERDAY

A QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH DAVE MELTZER

(Editor's Note: When wrestling fans talk about who the greatest wrestler of all-time is, several names can be considered. Frank Gotch of Humboldt, Iowa, just after the turn of the century, was the first American wrestling legend. A few decades later came the roaring 20s and sports heroes in America took on legendary proportions. There was Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb in baseball, Red Grange in football, Jack Dempsey in boxing, Bobby Jones in golf and pro wrestler Ed "Strangler" Lewis (Robert Friedrich) was often mentioned in the same breath. In the early 30s came Jim Londos, who followed Lewis as the game's biggest drawing card, but was never considered anywhere near Lewis' ability as a true wrestler.

By the late 30s, another pro wrestling legend was born. Lajos Tiza of Hungary. He grew up in St. Louis with his name Americanized as Lou Thesz. Thesz turned pro at the age of 17 in 1933. Four years later he became the youngest man ever to hold a major World's title when he captured the National Wrestling Association (predecessor to today's National Wrestling Alliance) title from Everett Marshall in 1937, at the age of 21. He was to go on and be the most widely recognized World champion on the globe, both in terms of miles traveled, countries visited and time at the top, in the history of the pro wrestling business. His sixth and final NWA title reign ended in 1966, just before his 50th birthday. He continued to wrestle on-and-off and was still a main eventer in the late 70s, and stepped into the ring as late as 1988. The span of Thesz' career was amazing. He was a headliner in the days of Strangler Lewis, through the first television boom which made Gorgeous George a household name, and still worked on top when today's legends like Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan and Terry Funk were cutting their teeth.

With Flair gaining more and more recognition as perhaps the all-time greatest, the natural comparison would be made with Thesz, the man more people would name than any other as pro wrestling's all-time greatest. It's really an unfair comparison to both. For the style of working that today's pro wrestling has evolved into, one would have to label Flair as the best in terms of consistency, ring psychology, presentation and overall durability. For a combination of professional success, pure wrestling ability and longevity at the top, Thesz would have to be considered the all-time best. While there may have been wrestlers in their prime who could have beaten Thesz in his prime in a straight match, none of them achieved the professional success on an international basis for as long a period of time. Certainly nobody will dispute Thesz' right to be called one of wrestling's all-time greats.

Now 73, Thesz lives in Norfolk, Virginia and trains aspiring pro wrestlers at his wrestling school. Along with Karl Gotch, he is considered the greatest foreign wrestling legend to ever appear in Japan. Most recently, he helped train Koji Kitao, a 6-foot-5, 310-pound ex-sumo wrestling Grand champion who is being groomed to be the next mat idol in Japan when he debuts early in 1990.

Q: I think a lot of readers would be interested in what Lou Thesz is doing today?

A: Right now I'm busy running my wrestling school. We've got four students who are decent. I've got a guy who I'm going to start with next week. He's 6-foot-6 and a good athlete and a good wrestler and he's very ambitious. There aren't any black guys around who can draw money today. If he can move and has some agility, maybe he can make it.

Q: What do you think of today's wrestling scene?

A: Well, some of the matches that should be drawing money aren't. I think the problem is overexposure. Jack Dempsey once asked, "How much rice can a China-man eat?" No matter what you have, there comes a point where it all gets to be the same. Just about all the credibility is gone from today's wrestling. Even if you are a good wrestler, it's like you're guilty by association. If people are laughing at the matches, then you aren't giving them wrestling. I thought when (Ted) Turner got into this that he'd put back some credibility. I think instead, they're as bad, if not worse, than the WWF. Jim Herd's a nice man. He's a super guy and I really like him. He's knowledgeable about TV. But he doesn't know a thing about wrestling. Some of the stuff isn't even good comedy. It's just low comedy. It's really too bad. If they would give enough actual wrestling and still keep the high spots it would have some credibility instead of that stupid leg drop that (Hulk) Hogan does. But the American people will buy a product without substance if it's packaged right. I think the problem with the NWA is that they're trying to emulate the WWF too much. For them to make it, they have to do what the WWF isn't doing, which would be wrestling. Nothing the WWF does has any rhyme or reason when it comes to wrestling. The NWA's problem is that they have a board. I sat in on them once. There are a lot of people making decisions that have never been associated with any success in the wrestling business. When you're making matches, the first match through the last match should be important. That's how you advance people, by moving up the ladder. When the matchmaking becomes repetitious, people get tired of it. I think they should try and put some credibility into it. Look at the UWF. Every match on the card is important.

Q: Of today's wrestlers, who do you enjoy watching the most?

A: The NWA has several guys who can do it. I really like Rick Steiner. He's pretty flashy and he can really wrestle. He can make sophisticated moves like the Russians. The know-how and doing the moves right is really important. His brother is good but he still has to learn more. Mike Rotunda is as good as anyone they have. He has a super body for a wrestler. He's got long muscles. A big, pumped up guy gets into trouble when he has to go the distance. Steve Williams can do it, too. But they aren't showing it so the cream isn't allowed to rise to the top. Ric Flair's a hell of a guy and a great showman, but he can get repetitious. If you watch a tape of him from five years ago you see the same moves you see today. He should have added a new move or two every year for variety.

Q: How closely do you follow other wrestling groups?

A: I follow the UWF fairly well. I don't understand how they are doing so well with what they're doing. I see tapes of them and it isn't even good shooting. There are a lot of beautiful shoot moves and they aren't doing them. Some of the stuff they do isn't credible. They sell moves that aren't that devastating. It's pretty amateurish, actually, but they're drawing money. Their success has been a surprise. They've done a great job in selling their product. I expected them to do well at first but they have to keep re-making the same matches so I didn't expect it to stay this hot. But the group has credibility and I admire them for it. You know Karl Gotch isn't with the group anymore. He wanted them to do pure wrestling with none of the kick-boxing stuff. I think the combination of the two is great. I think they were right

to combine them because the kicks are very colorful. Also, when you combine kick-boxing, Greco-Roman, free style and submissions, you've got it all.

Q: You're going to Japan next week for the Tokyo Dome show to second Koji Kitao. What do you think of him?

A: It was a joy to work with him. No matter what you tell him to do, he'll do it. He nearly killed the guy (Apollo Sugawara) who was teaching him when he was learning a belly-to-belly suplex. He doesn't have the elasticity to do some of the moves right. He's so big and strong that he should be able to do the moves but the moves look too rigid. But he's strong as hell. He came here and he just sat down and did the 800 pound stack on the seated cable row like it was nothing. We couldn't believe it. We had a girl who was about 125 pounds stand on the machine to add weight and he still did it like it was nothing. He was doing it so easy he'd be pulling all that weight and talking to us at the same time. He was here six weeks. The first day he got here he just picked up the 110 pound dumbbells and started doing flies with them with no problem. He picked them up. Did his 10 reps. Then just got up and put them back on the rack. A guy at the gym, who is a 500 pound bench presser, just looked at me and rolled his eyes and said, "Where did you find this guy?" And for a big guy, he can move. But he was so big. We had him running and doing ab (stomach) work and he's down 50 pounds. And he was paying me big money to teach him, but every time when we'd finish training, he'd say "Thank you."

I wish we had him for a year. Six weeks just isn't enough. It took me 50 years to learn this. Brad (Rheingans) has been working with him. Bam Bam Bigelow should do well with him (in his Japanese debut match). I was really impressed with his attitude. I'll really be glad to see the match with Williams against the Russian (Salman Hashimikov). Williams is a lot smarter as a wrestler than anyone gives him credit for. And he's got so much power. I don't know about his conditioning. The Russian is a really nice guy and he's also strong as hell. The guy is super in greco-roman but so-so in free style. But the moves he does take incredible power. He was a good performer from his first night in and picked things up rapidly.

Q: Tell us a little about your beginnings in wrestling?

A: I started working when I was 17, for Tony Stecher and Pinky George. I was wrestling in St. Louis when Ed Lewis came to town. He was going to have a workout and some of the guys told me that I could take care of him. But I couldn't. He squashed me. But nobody else could take care of him either. A lot of the stuff I teach today is the stuff I learned from him and Ray Steele. I went to Oakland for Ad Santell, who was a great wrestler. I think there are times when everybody wants to quit and thinks they aren't good enough. I kept thinking about going back to fixing shoes. Fortunately, as time went on, the moves came easier. I started handling people easier and kept going. I was really dedicated and fanatical about it. Wrestling was my whole

life. I went to bed thinking of new moves. When the other kids went out to the dances, I'd be working out. At that time, wrestling ability meant something.

Q: How did the promotion of wrestling differ in the days before television?

A: Well, they would take me to the schools and we'd go to the gym and workout before a big match. In St. Louis, if you didn't work out, they pulled you from the card. We had public workouts before a big match. We charged 50 cents. We used the radio and newspapers. It worked very well at the time and we were drawing big money. When TV first started, it changed everything. You could get over big with just a month of television. Before, it took some people 20 years to become a star. Now, there's so much wrestling on television that it's hard to get anyone over.

Q: How is your book going?

A: Very slowly. I want to really get to work on it. I don't want to tell-all about the business, but write a book about wrestlers. Some of the guys were really wild and all. The stuff the guys do today outside the ring with the women and all is the same thing they did years ago. Maybe we'll need a good attorney. But I want to write more about the wres-

tlers. Maybe I'll tell some truth about people who have posed as athletes. But I don't want to be like Bruno Sammartino and say that all the matches in my day were shoots but today everybody is working.

Q: What are your fondest memories of your wrestling career?

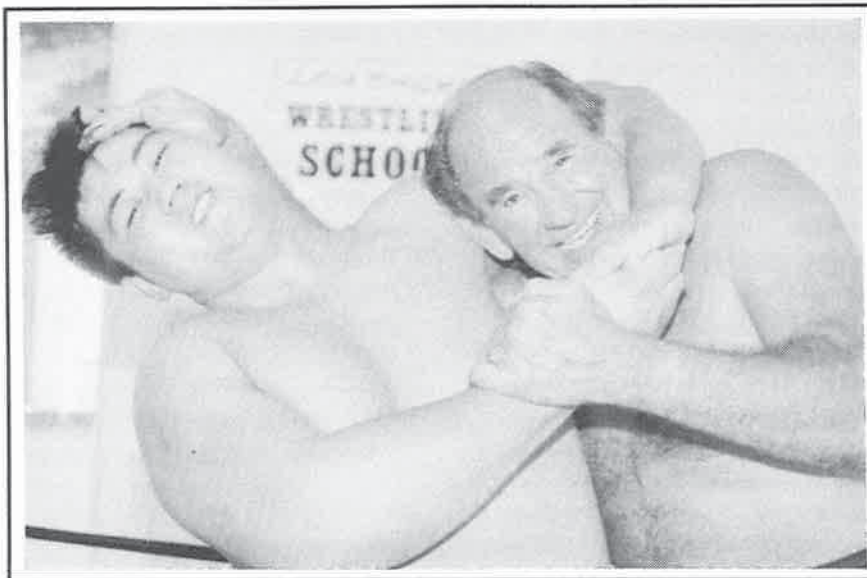
A: The early days. When I trained in St. Louis with Ray Steele, George Dragos (former Olympic champion) and Ed Lewis. Those are the

nicest memories. We'd play handball, wrestle, and play more handball. Learning how to work and "hook" (incapacitating and inescapable holds) was really fun. It was like walking around town with a .45 in your belt because you knew in any situation, you could take care of yourself. The most fun was learning. The least fun was dealing with people who were always trying to ace you out. Going on the road and not making any money wasn't so much fun.

Q: What got you on the road to the top?

A: St. Louis didn't have a hometown boy who had been a wrestling star. Jim Londos lived in St. Louis for a time, but everybody knew he was from Greece. I was born in Hungary, but grew up in St. Louis. They thought I would draw a buck. The first time they put me in with (World champion Everett) Marshall, they weren't going to put me over. But the place sold out so fast it was like Maeda. They didn't want to kill the golden goose. But being the champion and making sure that nobody would try and steal it was really hard.

Q: Were there any hairy moments?



Lou Thesz with Koji Kitao

A: In India I thought they were going to double-cross me but it turned out okay. In Singapore, they really tried to fleece me. At that time, killing was a hobby there. I spent some sleepless nights there. But I got out alive, with my money and with the title. One time in England a guy asked me before the match if I was fit. I said, well I could be in better shape. I didn't know what he was getting at. He said you'd better be fit and then I realized. I told him I was fit enough for that, but 30 minutes later he came back and we didn't have any problems.

Q: How was the training different in those days?

A: Nobody used weights then. Of course, they were wrong. A lot of things we did in those days were wrong. We used to eat a steak before a match. That was wrong. Now, everybody knows you eat carbohydrates before competing. I actually learned that myself. I'd eat a steak before a match and I wouldn't feel good. Then I got in the habit of eating pastries before a match and felt better. Thirty years later I read the University of Illinois study to find out they had discovered what I learned by myself.

Q: When did the weights become prevalent?

A: In the 50s, some guys were getting into it. That's when I got into it. Nobody used the juice then. It's sad now. One of my friends was a Mr. Virginia, great body, filled with the juice. He's now 40 and he's finished. His liver is in such bad shape. His cat scan scared the hell out of him.

Q: And you still train with the weights today?

A: I push a little iron. I do an hour to an hour-and-a-half of weights a day. I weigh about 215. After the weights I go down and drink some coffee and talk for 15 or 20 minutes and teach wrestling for a few hours. I do some of it. Mark Fleming is the head coach at our school and he's a good coach. He's very good in free style and I teach greco-roman. I roll around the mat a little and still do the neck exercises.

Q: Does your hip bother you anymore?

A: No. The plastic hip replacement is integrated with the bone. It's completely healed. I can run with it and do anything.

Q: What kind of injuries have you suffered in your career?

A: I've probably had a few hundred broken bones. I've broken my ribs and hands so many times I can't keep track. My worst injury ever was a broken kneecap. I was wrestling Bronko Nagurski in fact, in 1939. He gave me a flying tackle and I went over the top rope and shattered my knee on the concrete. I got up and finished the match, but I was out of wrestling for a year. I broke an ankle skiing in California. I was trying to do things that were over my head. I was out for seven months. My clavicle gave way several times but I always kept working on it. Broken fingers, stuff like that, you just kept working. If you laid off whenever you were hurt, you'd never be working. Being injured is part of the game. If that bothers you, you're in the wrong business.

Q: Are you jealous of the kind of money that today's top wrestlers earn?

A: Maybe not. When Ed Lewis and I were on the road, we'd make about \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year. That was an awful lot of money in those days. I don't know what that would be equivalent to today, but it would probably be as much as anyone is earning today or more.

Q: Tell us a little about Strangler Lewis?

A: Ed Lewis earned a total of \$16 million in his wrestling career. That's more than anyone else ever did. And that was before they had income taxes. He made more money than Jack Dempsey. When he was in his prime, he worked two or three nights a week and he often had \$10,000 payoffs. I don't know if anybody makes that today. Maybe Hogan. Maybe not. He owned places in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. The money came in easy for him in his prime and he was such a physical giant. He could go out and party all night and shoot and beat anyone the next day, and then party all night again. Now, if he had a tough match, he'd really train hard for a month. But money never meant anything to him. He was broke at the end. He lost \$500,000 owning two restaurants. He was nearly blind when he traveled with me. If he'd get a \$100 bill, he'd just take the bill and bet it on a horse. The money just didn't mean anything to him. After he retired, he lost a lot of money playing bridge. He was once ranked as one of the best bridge players in the country, but he told me it cost him millions to learn. He was a strange, unique person. He was a defensive wrestler. He'd just sit back and wait for you to make your move, then he'd beat you. His matches were probably terrible to watch. He used to tell me that I didn't have any patience. But if nothing was going on, I wanted to make something happen. His idea was to win the match. If people walked out during the match, he didn't care. He said the next morning in the newspaper, all they cared about is if you won or lost, not if people were bored during the match. He was married seven times. One time, after a divorce, I was pretty unhappy. He just said, "Look, I've been married seven times. And I was dumb enough that I married one of them twice." He found humor in everything. In those days there weren't good places to eat after the matches, but in every city, he always knew a good restaurant. He was always in an up mood. I used to ask him about old-time wrestlers and he would never say any of them were good unless they could give him a problem. If they couldn't give him a problem, he'd say that they couldn't wrestle a lick. The thing is, almost nobody could give him a problem. He was 5-foot-10 and 250 pounds in his prime. He was real thick. He probably had a 60-inch chest. He was so thick that if he hooked up with you, his legs were a few feet away. If you went to leg dive him, he just fell on you and you'd be trapped.

Q: How did you match-up size-wise with the wrestlers of your day?

A: I was a medium-sized heavyweight. I ranged from 218 to 222 pounds. If I got up to 225, I wouldn't eat for a day. One time when I hurt my knee and was laying off I got up to 240, but I got rid of it real fast when I got back into it. If you weigh 200 and you know your wrestling, you can take care of anyone. I had very few shooting matches. With Ed and Ray Steele as my coaches, maybe people thought I was tougher than I really was. Ed had everyone in the business mesmerized. It wasn't the fear of injury that kept people from testing me, it was the fear of losing their own credibility. There were guys like Buddy Rogers who would hurt people when they weren't ready. But in a shoot, he'd be nothing. I told him once that if he tried anything on me, I'd straighten him out in a hurry and that he wouldn't like it. Rogers was the kind of a guy who would hurt his own guys.

Q: Who were some of the best legitimate wrestlers of the 50s, 60s and 70s?

A: Jack Brisco was really good. Dick Hutton was a hell of a wrestler. In his prime, he was the best around. I think Hutton could have beaten anyone in his day. I saw him workout once with Pat O'Connor and he made O'Connor look real bad, and O'Connor was a good wrestler. But Hutton wasn't colorful. I think he could have beaten me or any of us. One time Al Haft had us booked in Pittsburgh and they had this athletic commissioner who was by the book and he

told us before the match that if this thing isn't a real contest that there would be some indictments. I ran him out of the dressing room. He told me he had two Olympic judges to make sure it was the real thing. Haft knew about it in advance and he didn't have the guts to even show up for the card. I'd been tipped off beforehand by O'Connor and Hutton that we would have to work a shoot. We did three falls, making everything look totally legitimate. That idiot and his judges said it was the real thing. We did nothing but moves that would hold water. Hutton was so credible with everything he did that we pulled it off. He was the best around in his time. Brisco wasn't far behind. Brisco was really good but he didn't like the business and the way that promoters treated him. Mike DiBiase was a salty guy and very good. His son Ted is a supreme worker. If he was permitted to be, he'd be the best guy in the WWF. But Ted is not the wrestler his father was. When I was champ, Verne Gagne, Yvon Robert, Billy Watson and Bill Longson were all good performers. I had weeks where I made \$10,000 if I worked three big cities during the week.

Q: What do you think of Hulk Hogan?

A: He's a money maker. His work is atrocious. He's not a wrestler at all. Actually, he's a joke as a wrestler. I could go to a high school and find guys who could beat him, and that's really a shame for a guy like that to be portrayed as a champion wrestler. Now Randy (Savage) is a good athlete. He's not bad as a wrestler. In fact, he's good.

Q: What about Karl Gotch?

A: He was one hell of a wrestler. But he wasn't a businessman. Karl and I both worked with Rikidozan in Japan. Once Karl asked me that when I wrestled Rikidozan, did he block me. I said "Yeah." Karl told me, "He blocked me too, but I straightened him out." The thing is, Karl straightened him out, but he never got asked back. There wasn't a time that Rikidozan took a fall on me where he didn't say "Thank you, Lou" and he paid me big money and treated me great. Japan was great to me for 35 years. We had a five minute shoot in Hawaii. I think I could have beaten him, but so what. Karl's attitude was, "He can't beat me, so I'm not going to put him over." I worked with Karl in Detroit. I was supposed to beat him with a greco-roman backdrop which is a hold you can block. He blocked it and broke five of my ribs. I asked him why he blocked it and he just said, "I just forgot." That was the end of our relationship. It was uncalled for. If he wasn't going to do the finish, he should have just told me ahead of time. He had a lot of talent, but he didn't know how to make money with his talent. One of my coaches, George Dragos, was like that. A guy once offered George \$5,000 to put him over in his hometown. \$5,000 in those days was like \$100,000 today. But George wouldn't do it. If you're too headstrong as a wrestler, you're not going to make it. I always kept Hutton and Gotch apart. A lot of promoters wanted to put the two together in a shoot for their own enjoyment. But none of them wanted to pay them to make it worth it. Why should both guys get hurt for the amusement of some promoter?

Q: How about George Gordienko?

A: That guy was great. We were in Europe together and worked for rival promotions but we became good friends. I wrestled him in Edmonton and I was really impressed. Stu Hart booked the match because he wanted to see it and had us go for an hour. I tried to get him to blow up but he didn't. At that point I tried to bring him into the United States and was going to give him the title in the early 50s. I was so busy, I was being a promoter, booker and the World champion. I was going crazy. But I couldn't get him in the country. I didn't know it at the time, but it turned out he

was a communist and that was a big deal in those days. The government tried to get him to sign a paper where he would renounce his communism. I told him he'd be making \$100,000 minimum as World champion and he was making nothing in Canada. But he wouldn't sign it.

Q: Verne Gagne?

A: He was a good wrestler. He was of Olympic calibre. I think Ray Gunkel beat him once in college but he was really good.

Q: Dory Funk, Sr?

A: He wasn't big enough and didn't have the complete background. He was a good amateur wrestler, but he wasn't in Gagne's class. His sons were not great wrestlers.

Q: But they were great performers, wouldn't you say?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Ric Flair?

A: He's a great performer. He can wrestle, too. Now Ricky Steamboat, he's a great wrestler. Both are super guys. I thought the match they had in New Orleans was very good. They had great finishes to all three falls and the final fall finish was ingenious to promote a rematch. The wrestling was very good and the work was great.

Q: Antonio Inoki?

A: He's done an awful lot with his life. Karl (Gotch) taught him how to wrestle. I get along with him real well. He's definitely an egomaniac, but he's not a bad guy. He was a good wrestler, but not a world-beater or anything.

Q: The Destroyer (Dick Beyer)?

A: He was a good wrestler. He coached at Syracuse. He wasn't one of the very best, but he was good. He wasn't even in the class with Hutton, Gordienko, Steiner or Rotunda.

Q: Gorgeous George?

A: He brought out the biggest changes ever in the business. He wasn't the first guy with the bleached blond hair and the fancy robes. A guy named Lord Lansdown was the first. I think he was out of Ohio. What got George over was that Bob Hope used to watch him wrestle at Hollywood Legion Stadium. Hope took him to Paramount Studios. Hope was the one who got him over and got him all over television. When George was hot, I never saw anything like it. He could sell out anywhere with anyone. He was so over that wherever he wrestled, he would get 20 percent of the house. That was just incredible. But everyone wanted him because giving him 20 percent of a full house still left you with more money than a normal house without having to pay him. I think we once had a run of 21 straight sellouts. The next biggest draw ever was Hogan. Maybe more people see Hogan because of all the different television wrestling shows available. But George was all over all the networks. It's hard to say which one was more visible. But everyone knew George. We once had a sellout in St. Louis on a night with two inches of ice. You couldn't even drive to the building that night. He always put me over. He'd say, "You're the champ, and I'm a junior heavyweight." I didn't want to kill him off, but he'd say, "You're going to pin me and that's all there is." He was agile as hell and he was a good wrestler. He had a lot of guts. He had bad marriages, didn't play cards well and he went down the drain little by little.

A DIFFERENT LOOK AT RIC FLAIR: WHERE DOES HE STAND AMONG THE ALL-TIME GREATS?

It's the usual tradition in the Observer yearbook to do a feature story on the Wrestler of the Year. But in the case of Ric Flair, who captured the award for the seventh time in nine years, what more needs to be said?

You can go to a pocket thesaurus and look up superlatives. You can document his career, but for the last decade he's been featured consistently on a national basis and everyone knows the feuds and the legendary matches. Or you can look into the future. What will be Ric Flair's place in wrestling history. Without a doubt, he'll be remembered as the best wrestler of the 80s, just as Hulk Hogan will be remembered as the game's most popular and charismatic star. His place as an all-time great was solidified years ago. But more and more in the last year, people have been mentioning Flair's name as the greatest of all-time.

The first time I heard anyone give Flair that label was after the first Crockett Cup in New Orleans in 1986. Flair was in the bar after the show being his usual center of attention. Two people who worked on the show were watching Flair perform outside the ring with me and both remarked at different times, almost off-hand, that he was the greatest of all-time. It's been said to me so many times that I almost considered it as accepted fact, even more so after the first half of 1989.

But the greatest of all-time is a funny term. There is no real answer to the question of who is the all-time greatest, only opinions. People always seem to say someone of their era is the all-time greatest. No matter what Wayne Gretzky accomplishes, he'll never be better than Gordie Howe in people's eyes who grew up idolizing Howe. No musical act can ever be better than The Beatles, or Elvis, or Sinatra, or whomever you grew up with. Who was better all-around, Oscar Robertson or Magic Johnson? Sometime early in the next century, if there's a wrestler who can fly like Satoru Sayama, have the desire of a Terry Funk, the consistency of a Flair and the ability of a Ricky Steamboat, some of us will still say, well, he's nothing compared to Ric Flair.

Given that pretense, I decided to ask several legendary names of the past two decades, and of the present, where Ric Flair ranks among the all-time greats. For obvious reasons, no names are being revealed here.

"If I had to pick the greatest of all-time, I'd say Flair," said one wrestler who wrestled in title matches against at least a half-dozen different World champions, going back to Thesz. "The best guys I've seen are Thesz, Flair, Jack Brisco, Harley Race, Terry Funk, Pat O'Connor, Buddy Rogers, Antonio Inoki, Johnny Valentine, Gorgeous George and Ricky Steamboat. They were all great workers. A few may have had more ability. But as far as hard work every night and putting everything together in one package, Flair is the best. I wouldn't say Flair had the most ability as a worker, but he worked harder than anyone. I think Lou (Thesz) did as much for the title as anyone. But I'd put Flair above him because of what he's done in the ring. I think that's what the business is, what you can do in the ring."

One of today's big names concurred with that viewpoint.

"There have been a few guys who could do a better promo (interview). Some have been better at wrestling. Some were better at high spots. But there has never been anyone who had as much of everything as Flair. I'd say virtually everyone in the business would say he's the best."

Well, not everyone. Another wrestler, who has seen Flair's career almost from the start, wouldn't go as far with his praise.

"He's one of the best for sure.

But everyone has their own style and I don't want to say he's outright the best. I think Curt Hennig might be the best right now. I've got a feeling he might be just a bit better. His bumps are just great."

Another wrestling legend offered an interesting viewpoint.

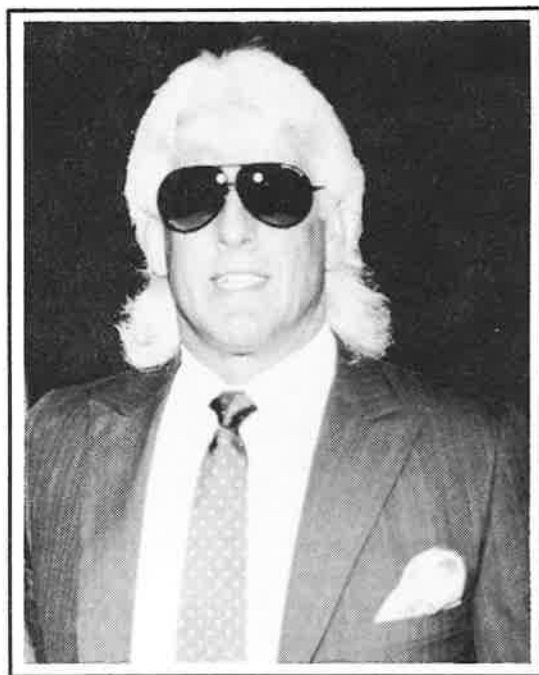
"Flair may be the greatest, but I don't think you can compare eras. The stuff they do today wasn't even invented twenty years ago. And if you did those moves on the mats we wrestled on, you'd never get up. I would say Dory Funk, Jr. was the greatest of the modern World champions. He would come into an area, keep the title belt over and keep the local challenger over at the same time. The way Flair was used didn't uphold the prestige of the title as well. And now, it's not really a World title but just the main attraction of the troupe. The title doesn't mean as much today. But as a complete wrestler, Flair surpasses Dory."

"I'm from the old school," said another. "I think what you do in the ring is what counts. What Flair does in the ring is many times more valuable than his ring entrances, interviews, robes and persona. He'd still be World champion even without all the other stuff. The best guy is the guy who has the most great matches, and he's had the classics."

The desire to work that much harder than most everyone else, along with cardiovascular conditioning and ring psychology are mentioned more than anything else as what sets Flair apart from the pack.

"I think what makes him tick is that he's in great shape," said one. "His ring knowledge is second to none. He gets the most mileage out of every situation in the ring. He can take a simple high spot and get an extra mile from it. He takes a lot of pride in his cardiovascular conditioning. He could go an hour every night if he had to. He's got a good head on his shoulders and is great as far as psychology."

"If I had to say what makes him tick, I'd say hard work," said another. "People who watch him closely know that he always puts out. There's no substitute for the hard work. When he's done with a match, he's drenched in sweat and has given his all for the fans."



As far as ring weaknesses go, the only things mentioned is a tendency toward repetitiveness and an over reliance on the chop.

"I think he should get away from the chop so much. The reason he does the chop is because it's something you can do as hard as you can and it make the business seem legit. The fans in the first row just cringe when he throws that thing. It puts credibility into the business. But he should limit how much he goes to it. He never threw the chop early in his career. Maybe he got into it with the Ronnie Garvin feud when they would beat each other until their chests were bleeding. But his repertoire of moves is well-stocked so he has the ability to show more variety."

"His main weakness would be that he gets stuck in a pattern. Now anyone who wrestles as many long matches with as much national exposure as he has gotten is going to have a lot of his moves repeated. But for a while there, it seemed like he was doing almost the same match every night. This year he changed all that when Steamboat came in and he's been a better Ric Flair than ever before."

"He's only human," said another. "He had to wrestle a lot against guys who were very limited. On some of those nights, his motivation wasn't a 10. But when Steamboat came back, or with Sting in 1988, he got really enthusiastic. When he was with guys like Luger (prior to this year), working a match must have been like pulling teeth. But he had a lot of personal pride and always liked to be the head rooster in the barn. He's a great company man in the sense that he gives everything he has to the business."

One of his contemporaries feel Flair actually hit his peak at about the midpoint of the decade.

"I think he was a notch above what he is today several years back. He's a little more tired and frustrated with his situation right now. The political stuff gets to him. About six years ago he had more spark and freshness to his work. His conditioning is still at the top, but he's about a half-step slower now. And he still had the excellent ring knowledge and psychology then."

Another disagrees with that analysis.

"His best matches ever were this year. He had matches in the past that may have been wilder and bloodier, but that match in Nashville (against Steamboat) was state-of-the-art. It was the best match I've ever seen. He had a point to prove this year and he proved it. If you watch most wrestlers, they are in their best shape when they are about 25, but

they don't know how to work. When they get 35, they know how to work but the body has lagged off. Flair kept learning, but what kept him improving is he kept himself in such great condition."

Most see the years between 1981 and 1983 as the time that Flair developed from being just a great worker into being an all-time great.

"In the late 70s he was a good worker, but he was still green. He was really aggressive and enthusiastic but more uncertain in the ring than he is today. Without a doubt it was in 1981 when he made a huge improvement. Anyone who won the World championship at that time should have improved greatly. He'd go on the road and when he returned, everything he learned came together in making a great match. In those days the NWA champion would go all over the country, into Japan, Canada, every territory and there were a lot of them, and wherever he went he worked with their best guy. You had to learn a lot from that kind of experi-

ence. He'd do a one hour draw with Harley Race somewhere and learn something from it. When he came to our territory, all the wrestlers would empty the dressing room and watch his match to see what he picked up."



One ex-NWA World champion agreed that wrestlers improved greatly when they held the title in the days when the champion toured the world, stopping in all the different circuits.

"When you were champion under the old system, you worked with every great worker in the country and in the world at some point. When I was champion, I worked in 22 different territories and sometimes wrestled seven different guys in a week. In each area, you would work with the best guy in their kingdom. It was a lot easier for the champion to draw money that way, because the champion was the outsider always going against the local hero. And all 22 territories had their own ideas about how to draw money and how to wrestle, so you had to learn 22 different styles. As for Flair, when he won the title and went on the road, he learned quick. He was not a totally polished performer in 1981. But when I saw him in 1982, I thought he was one-of-a-kind."

While Flair wasn't touring 22 territories when he first won the title in 1981, there were still 14 different circuits that he worked in during his first full year as champion. And as champion, he took the title belt to seven or eight foreign countries as well.

It's a responsibility that whomever succeeds Flair won't have to undertake. But it's also a situation that makes it unlikely the next long-term champion will reach Flair's level.

"The next guy, Luger, Sting or whomever, won't be going all over defending the title against all different people," noted another. "They won't have a chance to learn from all the different styles. I don't care who the next guy is, he won't be as good as Flair. Even if they find a phenom who is 21 or 22 and groom him, there aren't enough viable promotions to learn different styles left."

"See, that's one reason I don't want to say he's the all-time best," said another. "He was given the opportunity to be the champion and to wrestle the best guys. There are other guys who may have been just as good if they had been given the same chance."

Another agreed that going to different areas, even different parts of the world, gives one knowledge they can't pick up by staying in one place as the top wrestlers do nowadays.

"Look at Tiger Mask (Sayama). That guy was in a league by himself."

Tiger Mask's success came because he first learned Japanese style. He went to Europe. He went to Mexico. He was sent to Karl Gotch. He was a star everywhere before he came back to Japan and then he had a bag of tricks up his sleeve like nobody had ever seen.

"The problem with the Japanese is that they imitate the best Americans and are always trying to be just that much better. And they're all in competition with each other. A lot of them get hurt. They do a style similar to American, but it's 10 to 15 percent better. But a lot of the boys over there are walking around on bad knees."

"One of the things that makes you the best is not getting hurt. Well, everybody gets hurt. What I mean is not having the big injury that takes away from what you can do. Guys like Flair, Steamboat, DiBiase, too, work a great match but they're always under control. They don't move with reckless abandon. I've seen Japanese guys who were fantastic. Terry Funk had all that desire, but he was hurt a lot. I'd say a few were better than Flair when I saw them. But they took too many risks or were out of control. They didn't last long at that level."

1990 PREDICTIONS

By Gordon Slowly
America's Top Wrestling Journalist

1. Ted Turner finally does hire Bill Watts, but not to work for the wrestling company. Turner hires Watts to star in a new TBS weekly drama based on the life of sheriff Buford Pusser.

2. Verne Gagne, spurred on by the success of "No Holds Barred," makes a second foray into the movie business. Edward Asner declines to play the part of Verne Gagne, the promoter, again. But Gagne does get Barry Williams ("Greg" from the Brady Bunch) to star as the son of Verne Gagne. As part of the deal, they also get Florence Henderson to play Mrs. Gagne. Instead of Zeus, the killer heel is known as Hans (Hans Schmidt). Leo Nomellini plays the evil but brilliant television executive.

The plot revolves around a match where Hans destroys Greg, then attacks Florence and humiliates her by pouring Wesson Oil onto her. An enraged Verne then pulls off his sweater and clobbers Hans. Suddenly, a tall, balding, tanned freak (Randy Hogan wearing a stolen pair of John Studd's wrestling boots) attacks Verne. This sets up the climactic tag team challenge match, but they decide to end the movie at this point and sell the climax to pay-per-view.

3. Jerry Lawler becomes the most diabolical heel in pro wrestling history. He attacks and throws fire at anyone remotely related to Eddie Marlin and Jerry Jarrett, including

aunts, grandmothers, birds, cats and some people they didn't even know they were related to. This feud ends when Lawler throws fire at Marlin in his office and accidentally burns Marlin's last stash of cash reserves, causing the promotion to go bankrupt.

4. Inspired by his success as co-host of World Championship Wrestling, TBS promotes Kevin Sullivan to co-host of CNN's "Showbiz Today" with Liz Wickersham. Kevin is fired shortly thereafter because of his incessant habit of rolling back his eyes whenever Liz speaks.

5. TBS, in a desperation move to get the NWA publicity, decides to tie wrestling in with another of its established shows, "The New Leave it to Beaver." Eddie Haskell becomes Lex Luger's new manager, and in a dastardly angle, has Lex put Mrs. Cleaver in the torture rack. A tearful Ric Flair does an interview later saying that he's an old family friend of the Cleavers and his real name is Richard Morgan Rutherford.

GORDON'S TOP TEN CLICHES

by Jeff Bowdren

1. "He'd fight a buzz saw and give it the first two rounds."
2. "And now, a personal note, if you please."
3. "Boys in the back, fade to black."
4. "His face is a crimson mask."
5. "It's the dreaded Shinomaki."
6. "He's all man and a yard wide."
7. "It's human chess at its finest."
8. "This man was literally born with a silver spoon in his mouth."
9. "He's not fast. He's sudden."
10. "He'd take two punches to give one."
11. "He decided that discretion was the better part of valor."

Okay, we couldn't limit it to just ten.

All of this is brought to an abrupt halt when the Crocketts sue TBS. They claim that they originated the idea in which they would link wrestling together with the Andy Griffith Show. This was originally planned to culminate in Starrcade '90: Mayberry Mayhem from Raleigh, N.C., hosted by Jim Nabors, George "Goober" Lindsey and David Crockett.

THE GREATEST MATCHES OF THE 80S

By Jeff Bowdren

As we close out the 80s, we've been inundated with "best of" lists that seem to be coming out of the woodwork. Siskel & Ebert will give us their top ten films of the 80s. Publisher's Weekly might offer the top ten books of the 80s. TV Guide will present its top TV shows of the decade and Bill Apter will offer us some sort of top ten to close out the decade with (and more than likely find a way to include Mil Mascaras). So, without further ado, I'd like to present our own best of list. The best wrestling matches of the last decade.

Some of you are probably saying, "Hey, Jeff. You just did a list like this two years ago." Well, you're right. But a lot of readers don't know that so thanks for bringing it up.

I tried to pick the top 20 in order, but before that have 80 matches listed in no particular order. Where ever possible (or in other words, if Dave Meltzer or myself remembers), I'll list the date and site of the matches. Almost all of these matches are available on videotape and any true wrestling fan owes it to themselves to at least try and witness them.

RIKI CHOSHU VS. KILLER KHAN (July 31, 1986 in Tokyo): This was a brutal Texas Death match which ended a feud between the two that had gone on for several months. Khan bled buckets, and this was when Choshu was at the top of his game.

NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. SHIRO KOSHINAKA (February 5, 1987 in Tokyo): This was the best match of the many matches between these two at that time that you could make a case for. The thing I remember best is that Koshinaka kept working on Takada's broken fingers.

BULL NAKANO & CONDOR SAITO VS. DUMP MATSUMOTO & YASUKO ISHIGURO (October, 1986): What a brawl. Chigusa Nagayo attacks Dump before the match even starts, to gain revenge for Dump attacking Chigusa earlier during a concert which set up their hair vs. hair match a month later. When the match starts, Bull & Condor, who are normally Dump's allies, attack her like sharks going after a wounded animal and Dump is in the rare position of being the babyface. Nunchakus, gasoline cans, chains, scissors, you name it, this match had a little bit of everything.

CRUSH GIRLS VS. YUMI OGURA & KAZUE NAGAHORI (January 4, 1987 in Tokyo): This was the first time Lioness Asuka & Chigusa Nagayo had teamed in several months and showed they were still just about the best tag team in any promotion. The crowd reaction was just incredible.

AKIRA MAEDA & NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. KEIJI MUTO & SHIRO KOSHINAKA (March 20, 1987 in Tokyo): One reason this match was so great, besides the super work in the ring, was the finish. Koshinaka & Muto scored the big upset and won the IWGP World tag team titles. At this point in time, Maeda & Takada were far and away the best tag team in the world.

ANTONIO INOKI VS. BRUISER BRODY (September 16, 1985 in Tokyo): These two had several classic meetings, but this match went to a 60 minute draw. Brody was at his best here.

AKIRA MAEDA & NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. KAZUO YAMAZAKI & YOSHIKI FUJIWARA (May 25, 1987 in Sendai and September 1, 1987 in Fukuoka): These

four guys just beat the hell out of each other in these two matches. the first match was a successful title defense for Maeda & Takada and the second match was the upset title change with Yamazaki pinning Takada out of nowhere after Takada had seemingly kicked his brains out. I liked the second match a bit better, maybe because of the finish, but both matches were classics.

SATORU SAYAMA & NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. AKIRA MAEDA & YOSHIKI FUJIWARA (July 23, 1984 in Tokyo): This was a combination of UWF and New Japan styles and the UWF wrestlers were starting to go their own way, but still incorporated high flying and high spots in this match. Brutal, but excellent.

CRUSH GIRLS VS. BULL NAKANO & CONDOR SAITO (October 6, 1987): This match was the best one of the Crush Girls.

CHIGUSA NAGAYO VS. DUMP MATSUMOTO (November 7, 1986 in Osaka): This was a hair vs. hair match. It was actually the second hair vs. hair match. Two years earlier, Dump Matsumoto had come out the winner of a hair match and Chigusa had to suffer with short hair for several months. This was the better of the two because of the blood content. Chigusa bled buckets this time. Not for the weak of heart.

THE COBRA VS. KUNIAKI KOBAYASHI (August 2, 1984 in Tokyo): This match had me constantly jumping out of my chair and looking for the rewind button. Kobayashi gave Cobra a back suplex off the top rope and Cobra returned the favor by suplexing Kobayashi from the ring apron backwards into the audience.

TATSUMI FUJINAMI VS. RIKI CHOSHU (April 3, 1983 in Tokyo): This is where Choshu won the International title and was the best of the many famous matches these two rivals had before big crowds in the two different time periods they feuded.

STAN HANSEN & TERRY GORDY VS. GENICHIRO TENRYU & ASHURA HARA (December 11, 1987 in Tokyo): I was watching this match from the front row. It was just brutal the way these guys were pounding on each other for 29 minutes. It was the second best match I saw on my Japan trip.

NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. HIROSHI HASE (February 4, 1988 in Osaka): I was at a tape get-together at the end of 1988 to choose a match of the year and most of the people there chose this match.

KEIICHI YAMADA VS. HIROSHI HASE (February 5, 1988 in Tokyo): Do you realize Hase had two five-star matches on successive days with different opponents?

CHIGUSA NAGAYO & YUMIKO HOTTA & MIKA SUZUKI & YACHIYO HIRATA & MIKA TAKAHASHI VS. LIONESS ASUKA & MIKA KOMATSU & KAZUE NAGAHORI & MITSUKO NISHIWAKI & ETSUKO MITA & SACHIKO NAKAMURA (December 5, 1987 in Tokyo): This match was truly unbelievable and unlike any match I've ever seen or likely will ever see again. Dave Meltzer agreed that it was the greatest wrestling match he ever saw live. It was 50 minutes of non-stop action and high spots. I've never seen a crowd go through so many emotional peaks and valleys in a match. The crowd noise

was deafening from start-to-finish. Definitely the hardest working crowd as well.

JUMBO TSURUTA VS. TIGER MASK (March 9, 1988 in Yokohama): This match contained the best five minute period of wrestling of 1988. Unfortunately, the match itself went nearly 15 minutes, but the last five minutes were so great it was enough to make this list.

GENICHIRO TENRYU & ASHURA HARA VS. YOSHIAKI YATSU & JUMBO TSURUTA (August 28, 1988 in Tokyo): This was the main event of the Bruiser Brody Memorial card. Just a brutal slugfest with the four guys just beating each other to death.

OWEN HART VS. KEIICHI YAMADA (June 10, 1988 in Hiroshima): This was during Hart's brief tour as IWGP jr. heavyweight champion. Hart was defending the title in Yamada's hometown which added to the heat. Hart tried to wrestle a Flair-like style of making his opponent look good, combined with his normal acrobatic style.

SATORU SAYAMA VS. YOSHIAKI FUJIWARA (December 5, 1984 in Tokyo): This was a UWF match and Dave Meltzer saw it live and said that it may have been the most brutal and realistically violent match in wrestling history. The kicks Sayama threw at Fujiwara had to be seen live to be appreciated. It appeared more severe than blows in boxing or kick boxing.

OWEN HART VS. SHIRO KOSHINAKA (June 24, 1988 in Osaka): This match took place two weeks after the Hart-Yamada match and was every bit as good. The fans sound like they are going to bring down the house at the end of the match. Hart was originally supposed to keep the title here except he told Masa Saito that he was going to the WWF and the plan had to be changed.

THE FOOT LOOSE VS. SHINICHI NAKANO & SHUNJI TAKANO (July 19 and September 20, 1988): These two matches had the four best young workers in All Japan. They were roughly on the same level as the Midnight Express vs. Fantastics matches in the U.S. during the same year.

ANTONIO INOKI VS. TATSUMI FUJINAMI (August 8, 1988 in Yokohama): This was the long awaited match-up between the teacher and the student. To the surprise of almost everyone, Inoki, who was not in the best of shape at the time, went a great 60 minutes with Fujinami. This was the match that secured the Most Outstanding Wrestler award for Fujinami in my book in 1988. It was the best year of his career and carrying Inoki for 60 minutes to a classic match was his crowning achievement.

YOSHIAKI FUJIWARA VS. DON NAKAYA NEILSEN (July 31, 1988 in Tokyo): This was my personal choice for Match of the year in 1988. There was a genuine aura of real violence when watching this match. The funny thing is that Fujiwara's UWF buddies were watching the match in the dressing room and laughing and found the whole idea of Fujiwara getting pounded on by Neilsen as funny. They thought Fujiwara could have taken him apart at will had it been a shoot.

JUMBO TSURUTA VS. GENICHIRO TENRYU (June 5, 1989 in Tokyo): This match just narrowly missed on being in the top 20 list. This match had a classic aura about it. You knew going in that it was going to be one of those matches people talked about for years and it more than lived up to that billing.

NOBUHIKO TAKADA VS. YOSHIAKI YATSU (April 19, 1984 in Tokyo): This was the match that introduced

Takada as a budding superstar to the wrestling world. Contained more hot moves in the last eight minutes than during most 60 minute matches.

NOBUHIKO TAKADA & SHIRO KOSHINAKA VS. TATSUMI FUJINAMI & KEIJI MUTO (November 24, 1986 in Sapporo): What made this match so good is that it was never supposed to have taken place. Bruiser Brody and Jimmy Snuka were supposed to team together in the New Japan tournament, but Brody and New Japan had a falling out before the tour ever started. Takada & Koshinaka, neither of whom was originally scheduled to even be in the tour and were bitter rivals, were thrown together at the last minute and wound up being far-and-away the best team in the entire tournament. These two never teamed up again after the tournament. Fujinami & Muto were the second best team in the tournament and this was the match of the tournament.

BRUISER BRODY & JIMMY SNUKA VS. DORY & TERRY FUNK (December 12, 1981 in Tokyo): This was the match where Stan Hansen made his debut on All Japan turf and gave Terry Funk a clothesline from outside the ring to "ruin" the finals of the annual tag team tournament. One of the most famous matches in Japanese wrestling annals.

DYNAMITE KID VS. THE COBRA (July 5, 1984 in Tokyo): A friend of mine who is a wrestler and has had a chance to see every big match from all over said that this was one of the greatest matches of all-time, so I'm not about to argue.

RIKI CHOSHU & ANIMAL HAMAGUCHI & YOSHI- AKI YATSU VS. AKIRA MAEDA & TATSUMI FUJINAMI & KENGO KIMURA (December 8, 1983 in Tokyo): This was, arguably, the best six-man tag team match of the decade. All six guys were at their peak and this was the best match of the famous Ishingun vs. Seikigun feud.

TIGER MASK VS. PIRATA MORGAN (December 8, 1984 in Nagoya): Great match between two of the greatest flying wrestlers of this era. Dave Meltzer wrote in the 1984 yearbook that it was the fastest paced match he'd ever seen live.

JUMBO TSURUTA VS. GENICHIRO TENRYU (October 28, 1988 in Yokohama): It's hard to believe that when Riki Choshu jumped from All Japan back to New Japan, Baba didn't want Tenryu to feud with Tsuruta. Tenryu forced the issue if he couldn't turn heel and the rest is history. The Tsuruta vs. Tenryu feud was the best thing All Japan has had for the past few years and the promotion doesn't seem like it was hurt by Choshu's jump. This match will probably be overlooked in the future because of their June match of this year, but it was still a great match.

STAN HANSEN & BRUISER BRODY VS. DORY & TERRY FUNK (December 13, 1982 in Tokyo): These four had a lot of matches that could make a list of this type. They had many great ones, but in my opinion, this match, the finals of the 1982 tag team tournament, was the best of the lot.

CHIGUSA NAGAYO VS. LIONESS ASUKA (May, 1985): These two have had many classic encounters, and this was just one of them.

JUSHIN RIGER VS. NAOKI SANO (July 13, 1989 in Tokyo): This is the match which started out the feud and got both men over big in Japan. Some may disagree, but I liked this match better than any of the matches they've had thus far.

RIKI CHOSHU & YOSHIAKI YATSU VS. JUMBO TSURUTA & GENICHIRO TENRYU (December 2, 1986): Terry Funk, who was on tour at the same time, said it was the best wrestling match he'd ever seen. These four went to an incredible 30 minute draw.

CRUSH GIRLS VS. JUMPING BOMB ANGELS (March 20, 1986 in Tokyo): This match saw the Crush Girls regain the WWWA tag team titles they had held several times previously in a two of three fall match.

JUSHIN RIGER VS. NAOKI SANO (September 20, 1989 in Osaka): These two are probably destined to give us the match of the year in 1990. Best move of the match was Riger doing a back flip off the top rope and splashing onto Sano, who was on the floor.

AKIRA MAEDA VS. DON NAKAYA NEILSEN (October 9, 1986 in Tokyo): This match will always be remembered as the greatest mixed match ever. Neilsen sure was the best non-wrestler ever to be in mixed matches. Maeda was supposed to get destroyed while Inoki triumphed over Leon Spinks in the main event on this card. Assuming that Leon Spinks had a brain was one of the biggest mistakes Inoki made.

DORY & TERRY FUNK VS. STAN HANSEN & TERRY GORDY (August 31, 1983 in Tokyo): This was Terry Funk's original retirement match in Japan. The retirement didn't stick, but the memories of the match did.

ANTONIO INOKI VS. MASA SAITO (April 27, 1987 in Tokyo): This was the best of their series of matches with super heat and it showed just how good Saito could be in carrying Inoki. But the best part of the match was afterwards as Fujinami helped carry Saito away from the ring and Riki Choshu slapped him, rekindling their famous feud.

SATORU SAYAMA VS. DYNAMITE KID (September 2, 1982 in Madison Square Garden): Many people consider this the greatest wrestling match ever held at the Garden. When these two small guys, neither of whom had ever appeared in the Garden before nor were they ever advertised to be there, got in the ring, everybody went to the popcorn stand. Those who stayed got the treat of their lives as within five minutes the entire building was on its feet with more heat and intensity than the Garden has had for all but the greatest of grudge matches since that point.

RIC FLAIR VS. RICKY STEAMBOAT (March 18, 1989 at the Capital Center): You could probably make a case for 100 matches between these two as the best of the past two decades. This match was given six stars by the Observer, blowing the top off the five-star scale.

RIC FLAIR VS. KERRY VON ERICH (January 25, 1985 in St. Louis): This may have been Kerry's best match ever. He showed all the ability that he was always billed as having. It's too bad this match didn't take place on the famous Texas Stadium card in 1984, because if it had, it would be remembered today as the greatest wrestling match of all-time.

RIC FLAIR VS. BRUISER BRODY (January 4, 1985 in St. Louis): Just a marvelous give-and-take match. The crowd was going nuts here, which shows just how over Brody was at the time in St. Louis.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. FANTASTICS (April 26, 1988 in Chattanooga): These four had a lot of matches that could have made this list, but this was the best. It was the match which went more than 40 minutes with the Fantastics finally winning the U.S. tag team titles.

FREEBIRDS VS. VON ERICHS (July 4, 1983 and July 4, 1984 in Fort Worth): There were many of these matchups as well that could make the list, but these were probably the two best. The 1983 match was a 2 of 3 fall match, while the 1984 match, which was five-stars even though it included Mike, was the match which got the Bad Street match over as a gimmick for years in Texas.

FANTASTICS VS. SHEEPHERDERS (April 7, 1986 in New Orleans): This was the match which stole the show at the first Crockett Cup. Lots of blood and violence and it was the best example, with all the turns in the story and post-match brawl, of Bill Watts style wrestling.

TED DIBIASE VS. DICK MURDOCH (December 31, 1985 in Oklahoma City): Let's not be confused into thinking this was a wrestling match, because it wasn't. I don't think a single hold was used. This was one of DiBiase's first matches back after a Japan tour, though they did an angle before he left, where Murdoch "injured" him.

RICKY STEAMBOAT & JAY YOUNGBLOOD VS. SGT. SLAUGHTER & DON KERNODLE (March 12, 1983 in Greensboro): This was the match which spawned the idea of Starrcade, as the bout drew a sellout 16,000 fans in Greensboro and turned almost as many away. These four went more than 45 minutes in a cage before Steamboat & Youngblood won the match and the NWA tag team titles.

PAT PATTERSON VS. SGT. SLAUGHTER (April 21, 1981 in Madison Square Garden): The legendary Alley Fight, one of the great brawls in pro wrestling history.

MIDNIGHT ROCKERS VS. BUDDY ROSE & DOUG SOMERS (August 31, 1986 in Las Vegas): My friend Jeff Steele said that this was the kind of a match which made him wrestling fan. Lots of blood, wild brawling and it really got the Rockers over as one of the top tag teams in the business.

NICK BOCKWINKEL VS. CURT HENNIG (November 21, 1986 in Las Vegas): This was the famous 60 minute draw that ESPN aired on New Years Eve. Doing a 60 minute draw on New Years Eve sounds like a recipe for suicide ratings, but once you started with this match, you were hooked till the end. Hennig really showed here just how good he was going to get.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. FANTASTICS (March 27, 1988 in Greensboro): This was the wild brawl from the first Clash of the Champions. Who can forget Bobby Eaton giving Bobby Fulton the bulldog on the table, or Jim Cornette ramming the table into an speeding Tommy Rogers?

RIC FLAIR VS. STING (March 27, 1988 in Greensboro): The match everyone will remember as the match which made Sting a superstar. The 45 minute draw which was voted match of the year and made the first Clash the card of the year. Flair was incredible here. Probably in a good mood after spending most of the previous two years in feuds with the likes of Dusty Rhodes and Nikita Koloff.

RIC FLAIR & TULLY BLANCHARD & LEX LUGER & ARN ANDERSON & J.J. DILLON VS. DUSTY RHODES & ROAD WARRIORS & NIKITA KOLOFF & PAUL ELLERING (July 4, 1987 in Atlanta): The first-ever War Games from the Omni. The most famous of all the War Games and probably the most brutal. Considering the babyface side, it's a wonder this was even a good match.

JIM DUGGAN VS. BUZZ SAWYER (November 11, 1985 in New Orleans): This was the match where the two guys brawled for about 20 minutes in the ring, then ended up going back into the back of the building with their brawl and

swearing up and down at each other. This match gave their feud a semblance of realism that I enjoyed.

RIC FLAIR VS. BUTCH REED (October 27, 1985 in Oklahoma City): Best match I ever saw Reed in, but with the opponent, it's no wonder. Flair thrived on having great matches with wrestlers like Reed in those days.

RIC FLAIR VS. TERRY TAYLOR (June 1, 1985 in New Orleans): The biggest match of Taylor's career was in a Superdome main event. The match went 44 minutes and Taylor gave one of the best performances of his life.

TERRY GORDY VS. KILLER KHAN (November 22, 1984 in Dallas): This was the famous Texas Death blood-bath with Kerry Von Erich as referee. While the highlight was the first Von Erich/Freebird handshake at the end, it was a great match because it was one of the bloodiest matches on a big show in a promotion that rarely featured blood at the time.

EDDIE GILBERT & TOMMY RICH VS. KOKO WARE & NORVELL AUSTIN (May 14, 1984 in Memphis): Gilbert & Rich were billed as "The Fabulous Ones" in those days, Ware & Austin as the Pretty Young Things. This was a tremendous brawl going up into the stands and onto the stage in the back of the Mid South Coliseum.

RIC FLAIR VS. LEX LUGER (December 26, 1988 in Norfolk): This match for the first time showed Luger as more than just a muscular stiff. Kind of a forgotten match with all the classic matches Flair was involved in over the next few months.

OWEN HART & BEN BASSARAB VS. THE VIET CONG EXPRESS (HIROSHI HASE & FUMUHIRO NIIKURA) (September 6, 1986 in Calgary): These four, all basic unknowns at the time, had a series of classic matches for several months that alerted the wrestling world to the fact that they were four of the most talented young wrestlers around. This match, a 50 minute scientific draw, was the best match of the series. Ironically, three years later, when all four should be superstars, none have had the success one would have thought. Hase, a rookie at the time, got a big push initially in Japan but has been phased down. Hart had a disappointing year, but should be a major star in Japan in 1990. Bassarab is out of wrestling, while NiiKura suffered a heart attack two months later and has wrestled sparingly since that time.

TERRY TAYLOR & EDDIE GILBERT VS. STING & SHANE DOUGLAS (June 1, 1987 in New Orleans): This was the Battle of New Orleans, and even though Douglas was in the original match, he had nothing to do with it making the list. Chris Adams ran in after Douglas was "injured" and the four brawled in the back of the arena with beer and concessions flying everywhere.

TED DIBIASE VS. RANDY SAVAGE (July 22, 1988 in Madison Square Garden): These two had several matches which could have made the list, but this was the cage match and DiBiase proved to be a human pinball here. A wild match in the usually sedate Garden, made all the more memorable by a fan climbing up the cage and trying to keep Virgil from interfering.

TULLY BLANCHARD & ARN ANDERSON VS. ROCKERS (February 16, 1989 in Hershey, PA): These four also had a series of excellent matches from coast-to-coast. This match was the most viewed of all of them, the February Saturday Night Main Event match which went to a double count out. Even Vince McMahon had to realize here that he had a team in Blanchard & Anderson that were simply too good not to give the tag team titles to.

RIC FLAIR VS. TERRY FUNK (July 23, 1989 in Baltimore): This was Flair's big comeback after the "career threatening" injury from Nashville. Wildest brawl in a long time in the NWA with a great post-match brawl. This match paid off what it promised, and it promised a lot, which is a rare commodity in today's wrestling scene.

SGT. SLAUGHTER VS. IRON SHEIK (June 16, 1984 in Madison Square Garden): The famous Boot Camp match which climaxed the feud Sgt. Slaughter has been living off of for five years plus. Tremendous timing from both men and it was one of the last great matches either man was ever involved in and the end of an era when it came to WWF wrestling.

MAGNUM T.A. VS. TULLY BLANCHARD (November 26, 1985 in Greensboro): Up until the New York Knockout match, this was the most famous "I Quit" match in the history of the business, and maybe the best as well. Many people say that this is the best match ever to be held on a Starrcade card.

RICKY STEAMBOAT VS. TULLY BLANCHARD (November 27, 1984 in Greensboro): This was from the second Starrcade, and was really the only super match on the entire show. Steamboat showed everyone that he was one of the best wrestlers in the world, something which must of gone unnoticed by Dusty Rhodes, since he was never pushed hard after this point.

RICKY STEAMBOAT VS. LEX LUGER (July 22, 1989 in Philadelphia): Even though these two had a great match the next night on PPV in Baltimore, this match was even better. Luger looked excellent staying with Steamboat, and Steamboat looked like the best wrestler in the business in leading things.

RICKY STEAMBOAT VS. RANDY SAVAGE (March 29, 1987 in Pontiac): Probably the greatest match in the modern history of the WWF before more than 93,000 fans at the Silverdome in Wrestlemania III. Hogan vs. Andre was the match which sold the show, Steamboat vs. Savage is the match that stole the show and made it the most memorable WWF big card to date.

WAYNE FERRIS & KEVIN SULLIVAN VS. BILL DUNDEE & DREAM MACHINE (April, 1981 in Louisville): I know that with a guy like the Honkeytonk Man, you must be thinking that there is no way this match could have been any good. How wrong you are. This was one of those wild, in the stands type of brawls that the Memphis area is famous for. A little bit of everything took place here.

JERRY LAWLER VS. BILL DUNDEE (June, 1983 in Memphis): There is no way you could make a list of the 100 great matches of the decade and not include at least one of these matches. Like Freebirds vs. Von Erichs, Hansen & Brody vs. Funks and Flair vs. Steamboat, these are the kind of matches that will live in history. This was the first loser leave town match, which Lawler won. One thing I really enjoyed about this match was the fact that all the other wrestlers in the circuit were sitting at ringside and cheering both men on, giving the match an even greater sense of importance. In fact, the regular TV show was canceled that week and they devoted the entire 90 minutes to a lengthy interview with both men and with the other wrestlers talking about probably the most famous JD of the decade in Memphis.

NEGRO CASAS VS. EL HIJO DEL SANTO (July 18, 1987 in Los Angeles): This was a hair vs. mask match that, without any local television, drew more than 7,000 fans to the Olympic Auditorium, more than either Ric Flair or Hulk Hogan, both of whom were appearing in Los Angeles

regularly at the time, had been able to draw. Many people who were there live swear this was the greatest match that they ever saw.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS VS. ROCK & ROLL EXPRESS (April, 1986 in Charlotte): You have to put at least one match involving these teams in any list of this type as well. The best one I saw, which never aired on U.S. television but was televised in Japan, was with Cornette in a cage above the ring.

After reading that list of 80 matches, you're probably wondering what can top these bouts. Well, we're going to try and put these top 20 matches of the decade in order, from No. 20 to No. 1, and here goes:

20. ANTONIO INOKI & TATSUMI FUJINAMI & THE COBRA VS. DYNAMITE KID & DAVEY BOY SMITH & DAVID SHULTS (July 1, 1984 in Tokyo): At this point in time, not only were Kid & Smith the best tag team in the world, but arguably, the best tag team ever to that point in time. The high spots with them and Cobra & Fujinami truly are the highlight film of professional wrestling. Shults and Inoki were almost never involved, except as spectators. Incredible pacing, and it was topped off by a great post-match brawl.

19. EDDIE GILBERT & RICKY MORTON VS. MASA FUCHI & ATSUSHI ONITA (1981 in Tupelo, MS): This is remembered as the second great Tupelo Concession Stand Brawl. The first, with Jerry Lawler & Bill Dundee vs. Larry Latham & Wayne Ferris took place in 1978. But this was a lot wilder. All four brawled in the concession stand for what seemed like 20 minutes, throwing everything, including the kitchen sink, at each other. The highlights included Gilbert hitting Fuchi with a jar of mustard. The jar shattered in Fuchi's ear and blood and mustard mixed and flew everywhere. The other was when the promoter jumped in to break things up and Tojo Yamamoto (who managed Fuchi and Onita) started chopping away at him. His wife, who didn't know it was all an act, jumped in and went into hysterics and tried to slug Tojo. Tojo tried to chop back but the wife wasn't selling anything except she went nuts since she obviously didn't know what was going on.

18. STAN HANSEN & TERRY GORDY VS. GENI-CHIRO TENRYU & TOSHIAKI KAWADA (December 16, 1988 in Tokyo): This was the final match of the 1988 tag team tournament. The match established Kawada as a legitimate main eventer, but featured an incredible individual performance by Tenryu, who worked the last 10 minutes of the match by himself after Kawada had his knee "injured."

17. TED DIBIASE VS. JIM DUGGAN (March 22, 1985 in Houston): The greatest stipulation match ever. The two fought in tuxedos, with a Coal Miners Glove on a pole, in a cage and the loser was to leave town. DiBiase put on the match of a lifetime here and Duggan at the time was one of the best brawlers in the game. This is what a great brawl is all about.

16. TIGER MASK (MITSUHARA MISAWA) VS. KUNIAKI KOBAYASHI (June 21, 1985 in Tokyo): This was the match that showed everyone that Misawa could live up to the reputation of the costume. The best move of the match was with Kobayashi on the floor, Mask does a dive over the top rope, flips in mid-air, and catches Kobayashi on the way over with a savage kick. It should be pointed out that about a minute or two before Misawa did the move, he had blown out his knee so bad it required surgery after the match.

15. RIC FLAIR VS. BARRY WINDHAM (January 20, 1987 in Fayetteville): This match aired for the entirety of

a World Wide Wrestling show about a week later, lasting 42 minutes and going to a draw. Great match, and a great job of calling the match by Dusty Rhodes at ringside, who was sweating so bad and getting so exciting just watching the thing that at one point he screamed out to Tony Schiavone, "Hey Tony, get me a cerveza."

14. RIC FLAIR VS. TERRY FUNK (November 15, 1989 in Troy): The best thing about this match is that it was hyped so big beforehand that it would almost be impossible for the guys to live up to the promised brutality, especially with a ban on blood going in. Arguably the best single performance of Funk's legendary career. The highlight was Flair tossing Funk across a table, Funk slid across and hit his head on a chair as he slid off the table. One of the few great performances of Flair's career where nobody was talking about Flair's performance after the match was over.

13. BILL DUNDEE & BUDDY LANDEL VS. JERRY LAWLER & DUTCH MANTELL (March 24, 1986 in Memphis): Arguably, this was the best Memphis brawl of the decade. This match was a few weeks after Lawler returned after losing a loser leaves town match and this four-way feud was so hot that it sold out the Mid South Coliseum in Memphis three weeks in a row, which incidentally, are the last three times wrestling has sold out the Coliseum from any promotion. This match was a Texas Death match and lasted more than one hour and had 27 falls. There were some incredible spots throughout and a really unique finish.

12. RIC FLAIR VS. RICKY STEAMBOAT (April 2, 1989 in New Orleans): Another classic match before a national television audience. These two went for 55 1/2 minutes in a two of three fall match showing not only that they were the two best wrestlers in the business but also arguably the two best conditioned wrestlers in the business as well. While this was a terrific match, it didn't have the magical quality to me that two of their other matches had. But still one of the best.

11. DYNAMITE KID VS. TIGER MASK (SATORU SAYAMA) (August 5, 1982 in Tokyo): Two of the greatest wrestlers of all-time met when both were at their peaks here in a 25 minute match of one incredible move after another.

10. RIKI CHOSHU & TATSUMI FUJINAMI & AKIRA MAEDA & KENGO KIMURA & SUPER STRONG MACHINE VS. ANTONIO INOKI & SEIJI SAKAGUCHI & KELJI MUTO & KANTARO HOSHINO & YOSHIAKI FUJIWARA (August 19, 1987 in Tokyo): The 1987 New Japan released Summer Night Fever is the best commercial wrestling video cassette ever produced, and this match was the main reason. It was a 10-man elimination match which went nearly 30 minutes of nothing but hot moves and brutal action. Every wrestler was at the top of their game here.

9. TATSUMI FUJINAMI VS. AKIRA MAEDA (June 12, 1986 in Osaka): One of the most brutal professional-style matches ever. Maeda just kicks Fujinami to death and looks incredible. But Fujinami's selling is so realistic that when he makes the comeback, even the most jaded non-believer would be jumping up and down with excitement. As good as the match was, it probably would have been better had not something unforeseen happened, which ironically is what the match is most famous for. They were supposed to do a 30 minute draw, and were building for the last 10 minutes to be incredible, but at the 21 minute mark, Maeda hit Fujinami with a spinning flying backward kick. The heel of Maeda's boot accidentally caught Fujinami's face, which literally exploded into a crimson mask--the ultimate in doing things the hard way. Fujinami suffered a legit concussion from the kick and was out of action for some time afterward. The two quickly went to a double knockout finish to the credit of

the quick-thinking wrestlers and the referee. Was a landslide winner for Japan's match of the year that year.

8. CHIGUSA NAGAYO VS. LIONESS ASUKA (February 26, 1987 in Kawasaki): This was, without a doubt, the best of the many memorable matches these two had with one another. The match went 35 minutes of nothing but incredible moves and near falls. It simply has to be seen to be believed, and established Chigusa as the best woman wrestler of the era.

7. RIC FLAIR VS. BARRY WINDHAM (February 14, 1986 in Orlando): This was from the second Battle of the Belts. This was Windham's first big match since returning from Titan and he showed that he was one of the five best wrestlers in the world when he was allowed to be. The match went more than 45 minutes to a double count out and the crowd was totally intense from start-to-finish. The match was originally supposed to be a 60 minute draw, but two of the wrestlers on the undercard went way long on this live TV special and they had to change the finish as the show went on.

6. RIKI CHOSHU & YOSHIAKI YATSU VS. JUMBO TSURUTA & GENICHIRO TENRYU (January 28, 1986 in Tokyo): The best tag team match of the decade. This was interesting because Tsuruta & Tenryu, who were usually the babyfaces when these teams matched-up, were definitely the heels here since they continued to work on Choshu's "broken ribs" from a post-match run-in by Tsuruta a few days earlier on television. The match started hot, with Choshu, with taped up ribs, grabbing the house mike and yelling to Tsuruta & Tenryu, "If you can't beat me tonight, then you know you'll never be able to beat me." Twenty-five minutes of hot action followed, with Yatsu looking the best he would look in his entire career on this night.

5. RIC FLAIR VS. KERRY VON ERICH (December 25, 1982 in Dallas): This was the match that started the entire Von Erich-Freebird feud, and was probably the most "important" match in any circuit during the early part of the decade. Great performance by Flair in carrying Von Erich, who was still pretty green at the time. Just as memorable, if not more, was the performance by Michael Hayes as special referee, starting as a babyface, and 30 minutes later, being the hottest heel in the business. The most memorable portion was Terry Gordy slamming the cage door on Von Erich, which sounded so solid that probably none of the 15,000 fans in attendance doubted for a second that Von Erich had suffered a concussion. What was great about this match was even though the "story" they wanted to get across was the Freebird heel turn, they gave you 25 minutes of a classic match before the turn even started.

4. RIC FLAIR VS. RICKY STEAMBOAT (February 20, 1989 in Chicago): One of those nights where magic was in the air. From the pre-match interviews, to the best ring entrances of all-time to 23 classic minutes of action. Everything about this match was five-stars, made even better for the viewers at home by Jim Ross doing the greatest play-by-play job ever for a single match.

3. LIONESS ASUKA VS. JAGUAR YOKOTA (August 22, 1985 in Tokyo): Yokota is the greatest female wrestler of all-time and she took one of the most memorable bumps of the decade. Yokota had Asuka all set up for a superplex, when Asuka reverses the move, holds Yokota up vertical, and drops her face first into the ring. Amazing. Little disputing this match as the greatest women's wrestling match of all-time.

2. DYNAMITE KID VS. TIGER MASK (SATORU SAYAMA) (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo): Besides all the expected great moves, this match had Dynamite Kid breaking

a water bottle on the ring post and bringing it into the ring. The spectacular finish of the best of three fall match (which ended in two straight falls of double count outs) saw Tiger give Kid a tombstone pile driver on the floor, Tiger turns to the crowd to signify victory, turns around, and Kid gives him a tombstone pile driver on the floor before both men simply collapse on the floor and don't get up.

Before giving you my choice at the best match of the decade, I thought you'd like to hear some other opinions on the subject. I called a panel of experts, made up of people who have had a chance to see all of these great matches from around the world on a regular basis. You may recognize some of these names from the letters section of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter.

KURT BROWN: Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo)

PAT HOED: Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo) and El Hijo Del Santo vs. Negro Casas (July 18, 1987 in Los Angeles)

BOB CLOSSON: Lioness Asuka vs. Chigusa Nagayo (February 26, 1987 in Kawasaki)

DAVID HANNAH: Jushin Riger vs. Naoki Sano (September 20, 1989 in Osaka)

CHRIS LASTRA: Jushin Riger vs. Naoki Sano (September 20, 1989 in Osaka)

JOHN MCADAM: Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat (May 7, 1989 in Nashville) and Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo)

REX REED: Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat (May 7, 1989 in Nashville) and Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo)

PETE LEDERBERG: Lioness Asuka vs. Jaguar Yokota (August 22, 1985 in Tokyo), Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat (April 2, 1989 in New Orleans) and Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo)

NORM DOOLEY: Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat (April 2, 1989 in New Orleans), Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter (April 21, 1981 in Madison Square Garden) and Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk (November 15, 1989 in Troy)

KIM WOOD: Tiger Mask vs. Dynamite Kid (April 23, 1983 in Tokyo), Akira Maeda & Nobuhiko Takada & Osamu Kido vs. Masa Saito & Hiro Saito & Riki Choshu (November 19, 1987 in Tokyo)

DAVE MELTZER: Lioness Asuka vs. Jaguar Yokota (August 22, 1985 in Tokyo), 12 woman tag match (December 5, 1987 in Tokyo) and Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat (May 7, 1989 in Nashville)

I'd like to thank everyone for their input and help with this article. I'd also like to mention that if Dave Meltzer ever happens to casually mention to you he's got a great idea for an article, be wary. Compiling this list has been like a second job.

My choice for the match of the decade:

1. RIC FLAIR VS. RICKY STEAMBOAT (May 7, 1989 in Nashville): What can you say about the best wrestling match that you've ever seen? Great ring entrances. A fantastic opening chop sequence. They took the crowd down at times. Brought them as far up as you can go. There was a great post-match angle with Terry Funk. About the only thing bad I can say about the match is that it didn't last long

enough, and it went more than 30 minutes. I just didn't want the match to end because you knew you were living through wrestling history in the making and you wanted to savor every minute of it. Someone remarked to me that in Chicago, it seemed like Flair was the better wrestler of the two because even with the great story-line, it seemed Steamboat still hadn't fully hit his stride after the long layoff.

In New Orleans, Steamboat had hit his stride and both wrestlers were just about even. In this match, it appeared Steamboat had actually surpassed Flair. I don't know and I don't really care, because this match was the thrill of a wrestling lifetime and I want to thank both wrestlers for the privilege of watching it.

GREAT WRESTLING MEMORIES OF THE 1980'S

By Jeff Bowdren

What's a great memory in sports? Things like Kirk Gibson hobbling to the plate during the World Series and hitting the game winning home run or Dwight Clark's catch in the corner of the end zone are what makes sports great.

The great moments in wrestling aren't always athletic, but they are every bit as memorable. I thought I'd take a trip down memory lane and look at just some of the many things that happened in wrestling during the 80s that I'll never forget:

- 1) Terry Gordy pile driving Ted DiBiase five times in the TBS studios
- 2) Ole Anderson turns on Dusty Rhodes in the steel cage match at the Omni in Atlanta
- 3) During a strength demonstration on TBS by Ken Patera, Jimmy Snuka is about to smash two cement blocks with a sledgehammer. At this point, Terry Gordy grabs the mike from Gordon Solie and recommends that "all the little kids at home try this out on their buddies at home."
- 4) The classic first and last interview by Ernie Holmes, the former Pittsburgh Steeler lineman who had a very short-lived wrestling career (like about one week long). Gordon Solie asked Holmes about guys who he manhandled during his career, and Holmes immediately responded with the name of Gene Upshaw, then got tongue-tied and couldn't remember the name of one other player he played against. Holmes then described one player, but still couldn't remember his name, and Solie looked at him and said, "The name's on the tip of my tongue, too."
- 5) Terry Gordy slamming the cage door on Kerry Von Erich to set up the Freebird-Von Erich feud on Christmas night of 1982
- 6) Jimmy Snuka, perched on the top of the cage, leaps onto Bob Backlund, and misses
- 7) Valet for a day with Jimmy Garvin and Sunshine working for David Von Erich in the summer of 1983. Best part of the whole skit was Sunshine washing David Von Erich's dog
- 8) The famous "Sunshine press conference" after her split-up with Jimmy Garvin. This was the best skit of its kind during the entire decade. Equally as good was the follow-up of:
- 9) Bill Mercer visiting "Jimmy Garvin's house." How did we know it was Garvin's house? Bill Mercer told us so. The best part was Garvin coming to the door wearing nothing but a towel and Precious wearing nothing but a shirt and Garvin saying, "Bill Mercer, I can't believe you came to my house."
- 10) Jim Cornette's birthday party for his dog "Fifi." This skit was done on a small Georgia circuit in 1983. Consequently, few people have actually ever seen it but it's the funniest skit I've ever seen. Cornette and the Cornette Dynasty (featuring

such wrestling superstars as Jerry Novak, The French Angel Frank Morrell, Norman Fredrich Charles III and Carl Fergie) come out after "buying time on the show," with party hats, confetti, noise makers and a cake. You know, of course, what happens with the cake. You haven't lived until you see five grown men singing Happy Birthday do a poodle.

- 11) Rick Rude smashes Jerry Lawler's car windshield with a sledge hammer
- 12) Randy Savage pile drives Ricky Morton through a table in Memphis. The best and most famous pile driver of the decade
- 13) Eddie Gilbert presents, "This is your life, Jerry Lawler." The skit was so well done that it was unbelievable that it appeared on a wrestling show. Eddie reads through Jerry's career with Lance Russell looking on and voices speak, just like on the old Ralph Edwards show.
- 14) The contract signing between the Midnight Express and The Fantastics on the old Mid South television show. Cornette and the Fantastics sign the contracts, Rogers and Fulton turn around and Bobby Eaton gives them both the greatest chair shots of the decade.
- 15) Roddy Piper hits Jimmy Snuka across the face with a coconut to start up their feud
- 16) The Mean Gene workout video: Gene Okerlund and Hulk Hogan train together for their big match coming up against Mr. Fuji & George Steele
- 17) Paul Orndorff clotheslines Hulk Hogan. Vince McMahon's best skit of the decade even though the twin referee thing was funnier and more creative. Best part was after the clothesline, as Vince is agonizing over the fallen Hulkster, Jesse Ventura starts snickering and Vince, in mock outrage shouts, "You knew it all along, Jesse!"
- 18) Akira Maeda gives Riki Choshu the infamous "shoot kick," the effects of which are still being felt today in Japanese wrestling
- 19) Ted DiBiase is attacked by Dick Murdoch before his long-awaited match with Ric Flair. Although DiBiase and Murdoch didn't draw the money as feuds like Freebirds vs. Von Erichs or Hogan vs. Savage or Hogan vs. Orndorff, this was probably the best conceived, orchestrated and performed skit of the decade. When DiBiase entered the ring for his match with Flair, Bill Watts regarded him as nothing more than pond scum. Five minutes later, DiBiase was personally responsible for the U.S. victory in World War II.
- 20) Ricky Steamboat rips off Ric Flair's clothes on the Clash of Champions in Cleveland. Up to that point, I'd never seen anyone take a bump over the guard rail while in his BVD's.
- 21) Terry Funk attacks Ric Flair after the match in Nashville, screaming maniacally, "He said I'm not good enough!"

TOP TWENTY IN-RING WRESTLERS OF THE 80S

Compiled by Jeff Bowdren

In alphabetical order:

BRUISER BRODY: Wrestling's last outlaw died an outlaw's death. But while he was with us, he was truly the meanest, toughest SOB in the business. At least, that's what you thought, isn't it? And isn't perception what this business is all about?

RIKI CHOSHU: Very influential, in that when he switched from New Japan to All Japan when 1985 started, the work rate for almost every All Japan wrestler was greatly uplifted. The Reggie Jackson of Japan. When the cameras were on and he was in a big match, he really shined.

TED DIBIASE: The only thing separating him from being labeled an all-time great is Ric Flair. If it wasn't for Flair, he'd have been World champion in the 80s and a great one at that. As solid an in the ring technician as you'll ever find.

BOBBY EATON: Probably the most underrated of the twenty best workers of the decade. The general public has no idea just how great he is and has been. But it's no fluke that he's been on three of the best tag teams of the decade, with Koko Ware (if you've never seen that team, they were great), Dennis Condrey and with Stan Lane. Does the best leg drop off the top rope that I've ever seen.

RIC FLAIR: The best of the decade. Probably the best of all-time. He's the measuring stick by which all wrestlers are judged, and will be judged for some time to come.



Tatsumi Fujinami

TATSUMI FUJINAMI: Japan's version of Ted DiBiase. His greatness has gone somewhat unnoticed in Japan. He was first considered to be in the shadow of Antonio Inoki. By the time he got out of Inoki's shadow, he was the guy who got lost in the charisma of Riki Choshu.

TERRY FUNK: In my opinion, Funk has to be one of the five best performers in the history of the business. As a heel, he has few equals in the ability to draw heat at the arena. As a babyface in Japan, he was worshipped as a national hero.

TERRY GORDY: Carried the Freebirds in the ring. He's recognized in Japan as one of the best of the Americans. Does a great job in brawling coming out of the corner.

DYNAMITE KID: Made high flying vogue and in doing so, influenced a decade of young wrestlers from Keiichi Yamada to Owen Hart. How many wrestlers have come out of Calgary that have copied his mannerisms?

AKIRA MAEDA: Before Maeda kicked Choshu's face and got kicked out of New Japan, he was a spectacular wrestler to watch. His 1986 match with Tatsumi Fujinami is a classic. He threw a great dropkick, but hated to show it. His unbelievable success as a promoter aside, Maeda belongs on the list for his ability as a pro style worker.

MITSUHARA MISAWA (TIGER MASK II): He has the misfortune of always being compared to an incomparable performer in Sayama. Best judged on his own. From that standpoint, he's certainly great enough to belong on this list. He was All Japan's best performer of the decade.

CHIGUSA NAGAYO: I've seen Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan live on numerous occasions, along with most of the other greats from this decade. But the most awesome spectacle I ever have seen was in December of 1987 when Nagayo and Lioness Asuka basically acted as coaches to ten girls with little experience and coaxed them into the greatest exhibition of professional wrestling that I've ever witnessed. The crowd was at a fever pitch for 50 minutes, but when Chigusa got in the ring, it was like standing next to a jet engine. Your ears really hurt. Puts Hulk Hogan to shame in that regard.

RANDY SAVAGE: The best rags to riches story of the decade. He began the 80s being blackballed throughout the business even though he was one of the best workers. He finished the decade as one of the three most recognizable personalities in the business.

SATORU SAYAMA (THE ORIGINAL TIGER MASK): Perhaps the most spectacular wrestler ever to perform in the ring. He could literally take your breath away. The one wrestler more than any other who constantly made you scramble for the rewind button when watching his tapes.

RICKY STEAMBOAT: An underrated performer. He was as great a worker as there was but always seemed to be in the shadow of Flair. An absolutely terrific worker as a 70s style babyface.

NOBUHIKO TAKADA: From 1983 on, he was one of the best workers in the business. He could have been the best in the business, except he hated the style. He was the best wrestler to watch in UWF style, but he was truly incredible in pro style. Being great to watch in both styles is something that really can't be said for Maeda.

JUMBO TSURUTA: Involved in big matches throughout the decade with people like the Funks in 1980 to Genichiro Tenryu in 1989 (by the way, the reason Tenryu isn't on this list is because from 1980-83 he was god awful). While Tsuruta doesn't do a lot of spectacular moves, he's been consistently good for more than 15 years. He was having great matches in 1980, and even greater matches in 1989.

BARRY WINDHAM: Living in Florida, I got to watch this guy develop into one of the best in the game. One of the things he did so well, even as a kid, similar to Ricky Steamboat and Tatsumi Fujinami, was getting beaten up and

making it seem realistic. When the heels were stomping him, you thought he was an inch away from the coroner's office. I never would have thought that he would have made as good a heel as he turned out to. He had one of the best sneers in the business.

KEIICHI YAMADA: Barring injuries, this guy could be the best wrestler of the 90s. A great flier. His shooting star

press may be the best single move of the decade. All the other great moves are imitated, but even the best fliers wouldn't even dare imitate that move. He's only 25 years old and if his body holds up, there's no stopping him.

JAGUAR YOKOTA: The greatest woman wrestler of the decade. In Japan they say she's the greatest of all-time, and who is going to argue with that?

USELESS (AND SOMETIMES USEFUL) WRESTLING TRIVIA

JOHNNY ACE - Name was originally from long-time Carolina star Johnny Weaver, who used the ring name Johnny Ace when he first broke into wrestling. Weaver got the name from a popular song in the 40s.

CHRIS ADAMS - Three time British champion in judo before getting into pro wrestling. Nearly represented his country in the 1976 Olympics. Younger brother Neal Adams competed in the 1980, 1984 and 1988 Olympics in judo, winning the silver medal in 1984

BRIAN ADIAS - Southland Conference shot put champion at University of Texas at Arlington

GARY ALLBRIGHT - Collegiate wrestler at University of Nebraska. Placed second in the NCAA tournament as a heavyweight and won several World class level amateur tournaments

TONY ATLAS - Won a version of the Mr. USA bodybuilding title while competing as a pro wrestler.

GIANT BABA - Was originally a pro baseball player, a pitcher in the Tokyo Giants organization, before getting into wrestling

BOB BACKLUND - Played college football and wrestled at North Dakota State University. Was Division II All-American in football and Division II national champion at 191 pounds in wrestling in 1971.

THE BARBARIAN - Was a sumo wrestler in Japan before getting into pro wrestling

NORD THE BARBARIAN - Played college football at North Dakota State and pro football with the New Jersey Generals of the USFL

VLADIMIR BERKOVICH - Soviet amateur wrestling heavyweight champion

TULLY BLANCHARD - Starting quarterback at West Texas State University and was All-Conference. One of his favorite targets was Tito Santana. Blanchard was named after Ted Tully, the quarterback of the Edmonton Eskimos, a teammate of his father's.

BIG BOSSMAN - Played college football at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Really was a prison guard at the Cobb County Correctional institute before getting into pro wrestling. Vince McMahon came up with the name from an early 60s rock song called "Big Bossman."

BADNEWS BROWN - One of the best heavyweight judokas ever produced by the United States. Six-time national champion, bronze medalist in the 1976 Olympic games.

JIM BRUNZELL - Played college football at University of Minnesota

THE BULLET - Got his wrestling ring name Bob Armstrong from the old Jack Armstrong cartoon strips

LARRY CAMERON - Played college football at Alcorn State University and was a teammate of Walter Payton's. Played pro football for the British Columbia Lions and was 1975 Canadian Football League Rookie of the year.

SCOTT CASEY - Played college football at West Texas State University

TODD CHAMPION - Played college football at Utah State University

RIKI CHOSHU - Represented Japan in the 1972 Olympics in free style wrestling in the 220.5 pound weight class

STEVE COX - Played college football at University of Tulsa. Honorable mention All-American as a senior

DOOM #1 - Played college football at Florida State University. Made several All-America teams as nose guard and

was a Heisman trophy candidate as a junior and senior. Played pro football in the USFL.

DOOM #2 - Played college football at Central Missouri State University. NAIA All-American linebacker.

PAUL DIAMOND - Played professional soccer with the Tampa Bay Rowdies as a goalkeeper in the North American Soccer League. Got ring name because looked similar to late 60s star Paul Diamond.

TED DIBIASE - Played college football at West Texas State University

JUNKYARD DOG - Played college football at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Name came from the chorus of Jim Croce song "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" from the late 60s (which also gave birth to the late wrestler Leroy Brown's ring name). Bad, Bad Leroy was "badder than old King Kong, and meaner than the Junkyard Dog. The wrestler Junkyard Dog originally feuded with the wrestler Leroy Brown.

JIM DUGGAN - Played college football at Southern Methodist University. All-Southwest Conference linebacker. Played pro football for NFL Atlanta Falcons and CFL Toronto Argonauts. New York state champion wrestler in high school

CANADIAN EARTHQUAKE - College wrestler at Louisiana State University. Junior World (19-years-and under) champion in free style wrestling in 1982. Famous as sumo wrestler in Japan under ring name "Kototenzan" and when he quit to become a pro wrestler, both Japanese promotions bid heavily thinking he'd become a major celebrity in Japan but it didn't pan out

MANNY FERNANDEZ - College football at West Texas State University

RIC FLAIR - College football at University of Minnesota

JIMMY JACK FUNK - Collegiate wrestler at Portland State University

TERRY FUNK - College football at West Texas State University

DOUG FURNAS - College football at University of Tennessee. Many times World champion and holder to more than 30 world records in power lifting. From a standpoint of lifting the heaviest weights in competition, is far and away the strongest active wrestler with a 600 pound competition bench press, 890 pound squat and 810 pound dead lift.

GREG GAGNE - College football at University of Wyoming

CHAVO GUERRERO - College wrestler and gymnast at University of Texas at El Paso. Two-time NCAA All-American collegiate wrestler

HAKU - Sumo wrestler in Japan before turning to pro wrestling

STAN HANSEN - College football at West Texas State University

SUMU HARA - Took ring name from the name of his idol as a wrestler, Ashura Hara, whose real name was Susumu Hara

BRET HART - Nationally ranked amateur wrestler in Canada

OWEN HART - Canadian collegiate champion at University of Calgary in 1986; second in Canadian amateur nationals

HIROSHI HASE - Japanese free style amateur champion; competed in 1984 Olympics at 177 pounds in free style wrestling placing sixth

SALMAN HASHIMIKOV – Five-time World heavyweight champion in amateur wrestling

HONKEYTONK MAN – Was Vince McMahon's original choice to play the character of Brutus Beefcake, but contracted hepatitis and Ed Leslie got the part instead

RUFUS JONES – Played college football at South Carolina State University

TOSHIAKI KAWADA – High school Japanese national champion in amateur wrestling at 167 pounds

KOJI KITAO – Grand champion (highest rank) in sumo wrestling under sumo name Futuhaguro. One of the youngest ever to be promoted to that rank

STAN LANE – The only wrestler originally trained by Ric Flair

JERRY LAWLER – Has his own television talk show in Memphis. Went to Memphis State University on an art scholarship

LEX LUGER – Played college football at Penn State and University of Miami and pro football for Montreal Allouettes of the CFL

MIxxMASCARAS – Represented Mexico in judo in 1964 Olympics. Has starred in several movies

BLACKJACK MULLIGAN – Played college football at University of Texas at El Paso and was on New York Jets taxi squad. Got ring name and gimmick as a copy of Blackjack Lanza, who was a main eventer while he was a prelim wrestler in the AWA in 1970

GREAT MUTA – Had a critically acclaimed performance as a movie lead in 1987

JIM NEIDHART – Ranked fifth in the world as a shot putter in 1977. Got nickname "The Anvil" because he won an anvil throwing event while competing as a wrestler in Calgary

SCOTT NORTON – World-class arm wrestler

KEN PATERA – Nationally ranked shot putter at Brigham Young University in 1968. Turned to weight lifting and held several American records. Won four gold medals in 1971 Pan American Games and represented U.S. in 1972 Olympics

DARRYL PETERSON – All-American heavyweight wrestler at University of Iowa

BRIAN PILLMAN – Played college football at Miami of Ohio; two-time Mid American Conference Most Valuable Player and honorable mention All-American; Played pro football with NFL Cincinnati Bengals and CFL Calgary Stampeders

BRAD RHEINGANS – Amateur wrestler at North Dakota State University. Was collegiate teammate of Bob Backlund. Three-time NCAA Division II champion at 177 pounds (1971-73). Turned to Greco-Roman wrestling and won several national AAU titles. Placed fourth in 1976 Olympics at 220.5 pounds in Greco-Roman wrestling. Won 1979 World Greco-Roman championship at 220.5 pounds. Made 1980 U.S. Olympic team in Greco-Roman wrestling (U.S. boycotted Olympic games). Coached U.S. Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling team in 1984.

DUSTY RHODES – Played college football and college baseball at West Texas State University. Was a teammate of Terry Funk and Bruiser Brody in college

ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL – Played college football at Moorhead State University

RED ROOSTER – Ring name Red Rooster came from an early 60s song called "The Little Red Rooster." Original ring name was Terry Taylor. Terry came from Terry Funk, Taylor's favorite wrestler while growing up. Real name is Paul Taylor III.

RANGER ROSS – Legitimate decorated military hero.

MIKE ROTUNDA – Played college football and wrestled at collegiate level at Syracuse University. Was ECAC heavyweight champion as a senior.

MASA SAITO – Considered the best heavyweight amateur wrestler to ever come from Japan. Placed sixth in 1964 Olympics at a heavyweight in free style wrestling.

TITO SANTANA – Played college football at West Texas State University and pro football with British Columbia Lions in Canada

RANDY SAVAGE – Played minor league baseball in the St. Louis Cardinals farm system

IRON SHEIK – Represented Iran in 1968 Olympics at 177 pounds in Greco-Roman Wrestling. Coached 1972 and 1976 U.S. Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling teams

DANNY SPIVEY – Played college football at University of Georgia; All-SEC lineman

RICKY STEAMBOAT – Got ring name because Verne Gagne thought he looked like a younger version of former wrestler Sammy Steamboat and named him Sammy Steamboat, Jr.

RICK STEINER – Collegiate wrestler at University of Michigan

SCOTT STEINER – Collegiate wrestler at University of Michigan. Placed in NCAA tournament in 1986.

MINORU SUZUKI – Alternate on 1984 Japanese Olympic team as heavyweight in free style wrestling.

GENICHIRO TENRYU – Famous as a sumo wrestler in Japan before becoming a pro wrestler

TIGER MASK – High school Japanese national free style wrestling champion at 177 pounds

JUMBO TSURUTA – Represented Japan in 1972 Olympics as a heavyweight in free style wrestling

GORO TSURUMI – Japanese national collegiate wrestling champion in 1969

BIG VAN VADER – Played college football at University of Colorado

KEVIN VON ERICH – Played college football at North Texas State University

KERRY VON ERICH – College discus thrower at University of Houston

BARON VON RASCHKE – Collegiate wrestler at University of Nebraska. All-Army wrestling champion. Alternate on 1964 Olympic team in free style wrestling as heavyweight

THE WARLORD – Played college football at Northern Iowa University

PEZ WHATLEY – College wrestler at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

WIDOW MAKER – Played college football at West Texas State University

YOSHIAKI YATSU – Japanese free style national heavyweight champion in 1979 and 1987. Made Olympic team in 1980 but Japan boycotted games and again in 1988 but International Olympic Committee ruled him a professional athlete and ineligible to compete

VICTOR ZANGIEV – Three-time free style wrestling world champion at 220.5 pounds

INSIDE THE UNIVERSAL WRESTLING FEDERATION

By Alex Marvez

(Editor's note: *Alex Marvez is a sportswriter with the Miami Herald who does a regular column on pro wrestling*)

Let's say the Universal Wrestling Federation received a slot on an American television network. Let's say the show was billed as "shooting," rather than wrestling, a combination of kick boxing, sambo and amateur wrestling.

The percentage of professional wrestling fans who would watch could be counted on one hand because the UWF doesn't allow the traditional showmanship qualities that appeal to most fans. Casual fans who would tune in probably would change the channel after a few minutes, finding it boring to watch a wrestler try and get a submission by working on an opponent's arm. Its main appeal would be to fans of contact sports, like boxing and kick boxing, or the hardcore wrestling fans.

Ironically enough, it's the lack of gimmicks and showmanship, and a physical, legitimate style of wrestling and kicking that has made the UWF the most successful wrestling promotion in Japan, and arguably, the world.

Unlike almost all pro wrestling matches, the UWF matches appear legitimate. The action consists mainly of kicks, amateur moves and submission holds. They specialize in moves like arm bars and leg locks that restrict movement in a limb and cause excruciating pain when bent in the wrong direction against the joint. Some of the key submission holds are the wakigatamae, a judo arm bar that applies great pressure on the elbow; the sambo achilles tendon submission, a knee lock similar to the spinning toe hold except the wrestler falls and sits while holding the opponent's leg, then starts twisting his ankle in the wrong direction, the half Boston crab and the chicken wing-cross face (the move Bob Backlund used as his finisher toward the end of his WWF title reign).

All submissions are usually not built up, but happen when a wrestler is too far away from the ring ropes to force the hold to be broken. The ropes are only there to restrict movement, not to bounce off.

Matches rarely end with pinfalls, because it usually isn't "legitimate" for a wrestler to be unable to kick out before a three count. Disqualifications are even rarer and usually occur for a rule violation, like when Yoshiaki Fujiwara was disqualified for holding Masaharu Funaki by the hair and delivering a head-butt in their May 4 match at the Osaka Baseball Stadium (which was subsequently re-started and Fujiwara won via submission). You'll never see disqualifications for foreign objects or for throwing an opponent over the top rope.

Certain moves are not allowed in the UWF rings. No punches to the face or kicks to the face or groin are allowed. The performers are supposed to kick, but not stomp. Wrestlers are also told anything that does not look legitimate should not be used. And some questionable moves, like a dropkick, should only be used if it looks realistic under the circumstances.

There have been problems with wrestlers using questionable moves. For example, in a match between Nobuhiko Takada and Bob Backlund on Dec. 22, 1988, Backlund wanted to lift Takada in the air after being placed in a short-arm scissors. Before the match, Backlund was told not to attempt the move because it isn't a legitimate move, but he tried it in the match

anyway. Takada wouldn't cooperate, and switched to another hold when Backlund attempted the move.

Minoru Suzuki tried some pro-style moves in a match against Fujiwara on a card in June. After knocking Fujiwara down, Suzuki delivered three Hulk Hogan-style leg drops. Fujiwara simply got up and laughed. In other matches, Suzuki has used pile drivers and has sometimes attempted drop kicks that are out of place in the match sequence.

Matches can end by a submission, pinfall or through the five-knockdown rule. The knockdown rule is applied when a wrestler is knocked down by a blow that isn't a take down. The fallen wrestler has a 10-count to return to his feet and resume a fighting position or else the match is over. On a recent card, Norman Smiley wrestled Fujiwara and got back to his feet after a head-butt, but inadvertently forgot to get his hands back in a fighting position and the match was stopped.

The public in Japan believes UWF matches are 100 percent legitimate. They are, and they're not. UWF wrestlers are told to defend themselves at all times, because keeping the public convinced the style is legitimate is more important than someone getting a broken nose for putting their guard down. Wrestlers are also told not to sell any holds unless they really hurt. One UWF wrestler described the style as 75 percent shooting. Takada even places a piece of paper with a prayer written on it in his trunks before his matches.

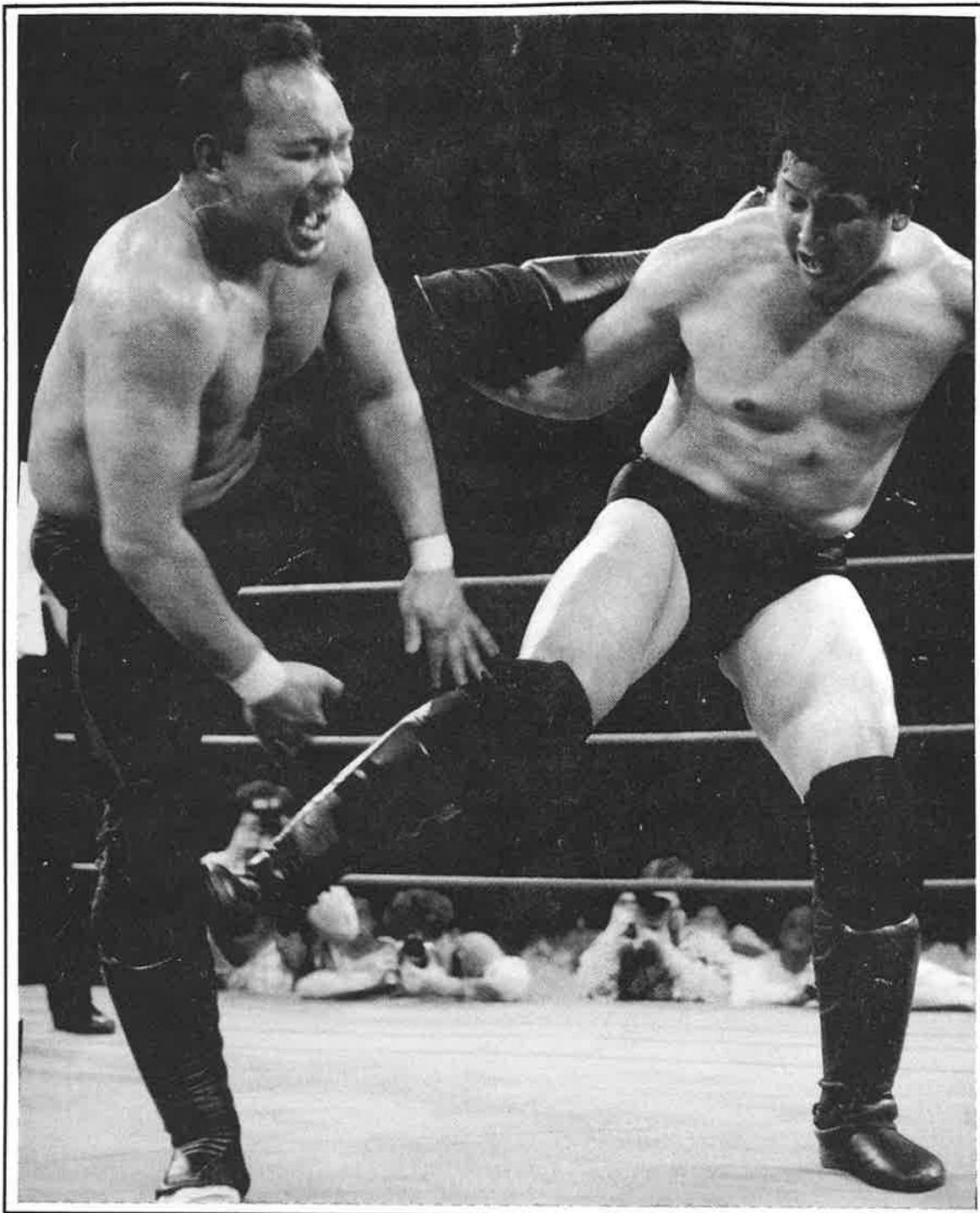
But essentially, the matches and finishes are worked. You couldn't tell, though, unless you knew better.

When the UWF reformed after almost a three-year absence, there was great skepticism about its chances for survival. The group didn't have a weekly television show and consisted of only three wrestlers with name appeal--Akira Maeda, Takada and Kazuo Yamazaki. The UWF was also going to hold only one card per month, because the "fighting" was too intense for the wrestlers to work more often than that.

When tickets went on sale for the first show in Tokyo's Korauken Hall in the spring of 1988, all 2,280 tickets sold out in less than 15 minutes, which at the time was the quickest pro wrestling sellout ever. Since that show, the UWF has sold out each of its 22 cards except for one, which was a guaranteed show in Nagoya this past June. Most of the sellouts occurred the first day tickets were put on sale.

The UWF broke all sorts of pro wrestling attendance records in 1989, and did some things that had never been attempted in Japan. Of course, the U-Cosmos card on Nov. 29 was the biggie. The group's first card of the year, Jan. 15 in Tokyo's Budokan Hall, was the first wrestling card in Japan ever shown via closed-circuit television. The telecast sold out all three closed-circuit venues and the 15,000-seat Budokan Hall as well, which was only the second time in history Budokan Hall had sold out for a wrestling show.

Other major feats for the UWF were a sellout crowd of 23,000 and a \$1.7 million gate for the May 4 card in Osaka, and a sellout crowd of 17,000 and a sellout in five closed-circuit locations for the August 5 card in Yokohama, which did a \$1.4 million live gate. A two-hour UWF television documentary midway through the year drew the highest rating for a wrestling show since the Dump Matsumoto retirement special in 1988.



Yamazaki vs Maeda

The UWF was also not afraid to take chances. Not content with the image that its drawing power was only strong in cities with hardcore fans, the UWF drew a sellout of more than 4,000 fans in Tokushima on February 27 for the first major card on that island since a "hot" match between Antonio Inoki and Backlund for the WWF title in 1981 drew only 1,500 fans.

Quite profitable, huh? Remember, these gates don't include concession stand sales, which average about \$20 per person at the live shows, the largest for any group in the world.

The UWF office is hardly like the World Wrestling Federation's. The group has just one office, in Tokyo, a six-person staff and a small core of full-time wrestlers.

The payoffs for foreign wrestlers have been small, considering the size of the gates. The average foreign performer will receive between \$1,600 and \$4,000 for a match.

The success now is quite a contrast to the UWF's beginnings and style in 1984. The original UWF was started by Hisashi Shinma, who developed many of the angles and promoted the younger stars for New Japan Pro Wrestling before getting fired after a power struggle within the promotion. Shinma's plan was to start a new group, featuring his long-time

business partner Antonio Inoki, the most well-known wrestler in modern Japanese history and at the time, possibly the best-known wrestler in the world. Maeda was to be his understudy and groomed to be his successor. He was to trade talent with the WWF and Vince McMahon, who at the time was just beginning to promote nationally.

But Inoki decided to stay with New Japan. Maeda, who was just one of many young stars with New Japan at the time, was thrust into the UWF's headline position. To help get Maeda over, Shinma arranged a tour of the WWF for Maeda before the UWF was scheduled to start running in April of 1984. But relations between Shinma and McMahon fell apart right after Maeda started the tour, and soon Maeda was doing jobs for the likes of George "The Animal" Steele and Rene Goulet.

When Maeda returned, he had developed a great dislike for American pro wrestling. However, the UWF still began promoting matches similar in style to those of the New Japan group. The UWF even used wrestlers like Sweet Daddy Siki, Cyclone Negro, Leo Burke and Cocoa Samoa as its foreign talent.

As the year progressed, though, the UWF style began to change. The matches became more realistic and started

incorporating kick boxing and submission holds. Satoru Sayama, the original Tiger Mask, returned to the wrestling world with the UWF in July after almost a year's retirement. After drawing two sellouts on consecutive nights in Tokyo and bringing much-needed recognition to the group, Sayama, in a power play, forced the ousting of Shinma.

With Maeda, Sayama and Fujiwara, who also left New Japan, dictating the style of the UWF matches, the group began the transition to the style used today. While the original organization enjoyed success in Tokyo and Osaka, the style was not understood by fans in the smaller towns. This greatly hurt the promotion overall, since they were trying to promote four shows weekly. The promotion was also without a television contract to help get the submission holds over to the general public. Because of many problems both inside and outside the ring, the group folded in September of 1985 and all its wrestlers, except Sayama, were absorbed by New Japan.

Ironically, it was after Maeda and company returned to the New Japan rings that interest in the UWF and its style began to grow with the general public. Fans started becoming educated to the submission holds through Maeda, Takada, Fujiwara and Yamazaki's television matches. After a match between Maeda and Andre the Giant in April of 1986 turned into a shoot, the "tough-guy" reputation of the UWF wrestlers began to grow.

But the UWF would have probably never been reformed had it not been for another shooting incident involving Maeda. This was with Riki Choshu, who was probably the most popular wrestler in Japan at the time. In a six-man tag team match in November of 1987, Choshu had one of Maeda's partners, Osamu Kido, in a scorpion death lock. Maeda delivered an all-out "shoot-kick" in Choshu's face from the blind side. Not only did the kick break two bones underneath Choshu's eye, knocking him out of New Japan's annual tag team tournament, but it boosted the already-high popularity of Maeda.

New Japan immediately suspended Maeda, but wanted him to return if he would perform penance, like tour Mexico, take a 15 percent pay cut, and put both Inoki and Choshu over in the middle of the ring. Maeda refused, and in the spring of 1987, he announced the UWF was reforming.

You won't see performers like Samoa or Siki on UWF cards nowadays. The promotion uses very few foreign wrestlers, and none who appear for a major group in the United States. Norman Smiley, who is the UWF's top foreign wrestler, MacDuff Roesch and Jumbo Barretta comprise the foreign wrestling talent.

The UWF also uses some top performers from other contract sports, mainly kick boxing and sambo wrestling. Among those performers are Bart Vale, a fourth-degree black belt in two forms of the martial arts and kick boxing champion of Ecuador; Chris Dolman, a Dutchman who was a four-time world champion in sambo wrestling; Duane Koslowski, an American who represented his country in Greco-Roman wrestling in the 1988 Olympics; and Maurice Smith, the world heavyweight champion in kick boxing.

The only foreign talent that was a disappointment was Backlund, who had great name appeal in Japan upon his arrival for his amateur reputation. Immediately after losing his match to Takada, Backlund began making gestures toward the crowd to draw heat, which isn't allowed. When he wrestled Funaki in May, his whole face was bruised and bloody because the two didn't cooperate in the ring. Backlund won't be returning.

The foreign performers arrive about one week before the card. They then attend the UWF training sessions, which begin at 10 a.m. and end almost five hours later.

There is more of an emphasis on wrestling and cardiovascular conditioning than weight training. Some performers use the weights sparingly, and only one of the regulars, Funaki, looks like a bodybuilder. But most of the wrestlers, as Mark Lewin noted, have surprising tendon strength. Their exercise program consists of dips, squats, push ups, chin ups and running. One UWF drill consists of the wrestlers jogging while carrying another wrestler on their shoulders.

In training, the wrestlers go over high spots in the ring and practice different types of moves, mainly suplexes. And since most of the UWF wrestlers have wrestled professionally and hate the style, they like to ridicule it. For example, during a practice session, one wrestler may call for a whip into the ropes and do a leapfrog over his rebounding partner. Once the maneuver is executed, the other UWF wrestlers who are watching are on the floor in laughter.

Even though the American style of pro wrestling is regarded as a joke by the UWF performers, they also believe some of the U.S. wrestlers, particularly those with strong amateur backgrounds like Joe Malenko, the Steiner brothers, "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig and Buzz Sawyer, could flourish under the UWF style. But after the disappointment with Backlund, who should have blended in well with the UWF style, it's hard to say for sure who could adjust.

"Some guys learn two or three submission moves and they think they're shooters," said one UWF wrestler. "Guys like Joe Malenko can do well from their amateur background, but they're not shooters because they don't know how to apply submission holds. It takes time to learn."

When speaking of shooters, Maeda's name is sure to pop up. To the general public in Japan, he is the "toughest" wrestler in the world. But to Americans who have competed against him, he's not the best performer there. According to them, the top five, in order, are:

1. Fujiwara -- "He knows so much," said one UWF wrestler. "When you get in there with him, you don't think about winning. You think about how long it will take you to submit."
2. Takada -- Regarded as the quickest of all the UWF wrestlers. Can both box and kick extremely well. Is also in better condition than Maeda.
3. Maeda -- Can live up to his "shooter" reputation. Is also stronger than he appears. He can bench press 315 pounds for repetitions.
4. Yamazaki -- Similar to Takada because of his kicks and quickness.
5. Suzuki -- A great amateur wrestler. Placed third in the 1984 Olympic wrestling trials.

While the UWF is enjoying enormous success in Japan, there's some question as to what will happen in the 90s. Unlike pro wrestling, the UWF wouldn't survive if the general public discovered the finishes of matches are worked.

That probably won't happen, though, and the UWF should become even more successful this decade. When the UWF reformed, Maeda, Takada and Yamazaki were the group's only "name" performers. And without Maeda as the main draw, the organization would have never gotten off the ground.

But after Maeda did a job for Takada in November of 1988, another main event star was made. Then, by April of 1989, the group had swiped Fujiwara, Funaki, who was being groomed for superstardom by New Japan, and Suzuki, who

was wrestling in preliminary matches with New Japan but was destined for a strong push in the future.

Right before the signings, though, a tragic incident happened that, oddly enough, increased the UWF's legitimate status. Kazuo Horiguchi, who was training with the UWF and set to make his debut shortly, died March 31 after suffering brain damage following a suplex in a practice session. Even though the incident was down played by the press and promotion, it helped the belief that the UWF style was "real."

As time passed, some of the UWF's preliminary wrestlers began gaining popularity for their hard work in the ring. For wrestlers that are rarely put over, Yoji Anjyo, Tatsuo Nakano and Shigeo Miyato are highly regarded by the fans and could be stars if the UWF's expansion plans go as scheduled.

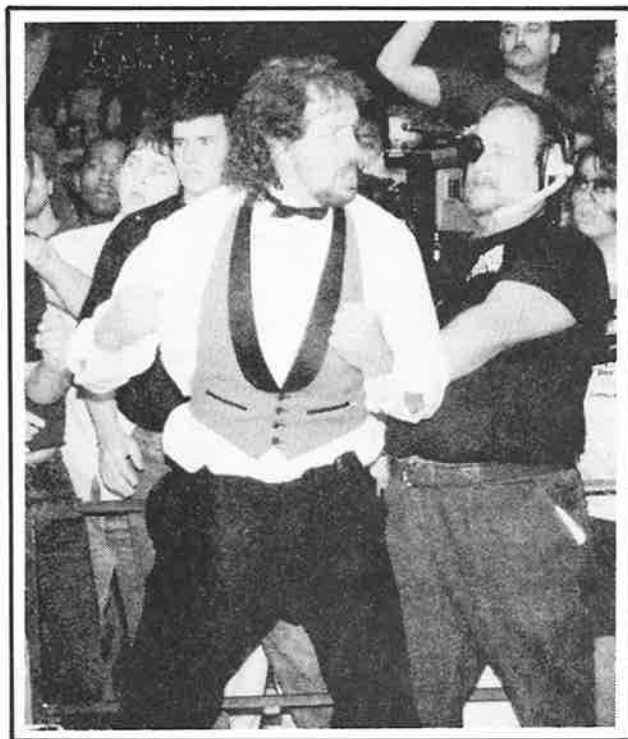
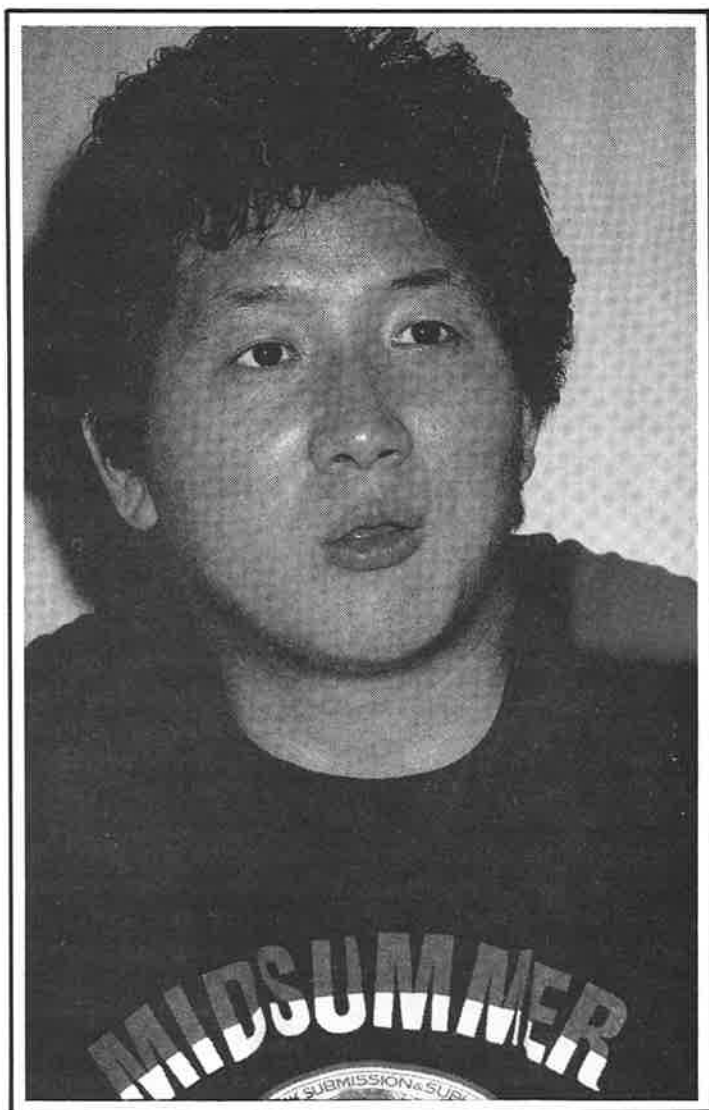
The UWF style doesn't allow for wrestlers to perform more than one match per month, because if they worked any more often, fans may start to think the matches were worked. However, the group wants to start promoting two cards per month, once enough of the underneath talent is "over." The group plans to stay off regular television during the next decade, because it feels the exposure hurts closed-circuit and eventual pay-per-view gates. The major cards, however,

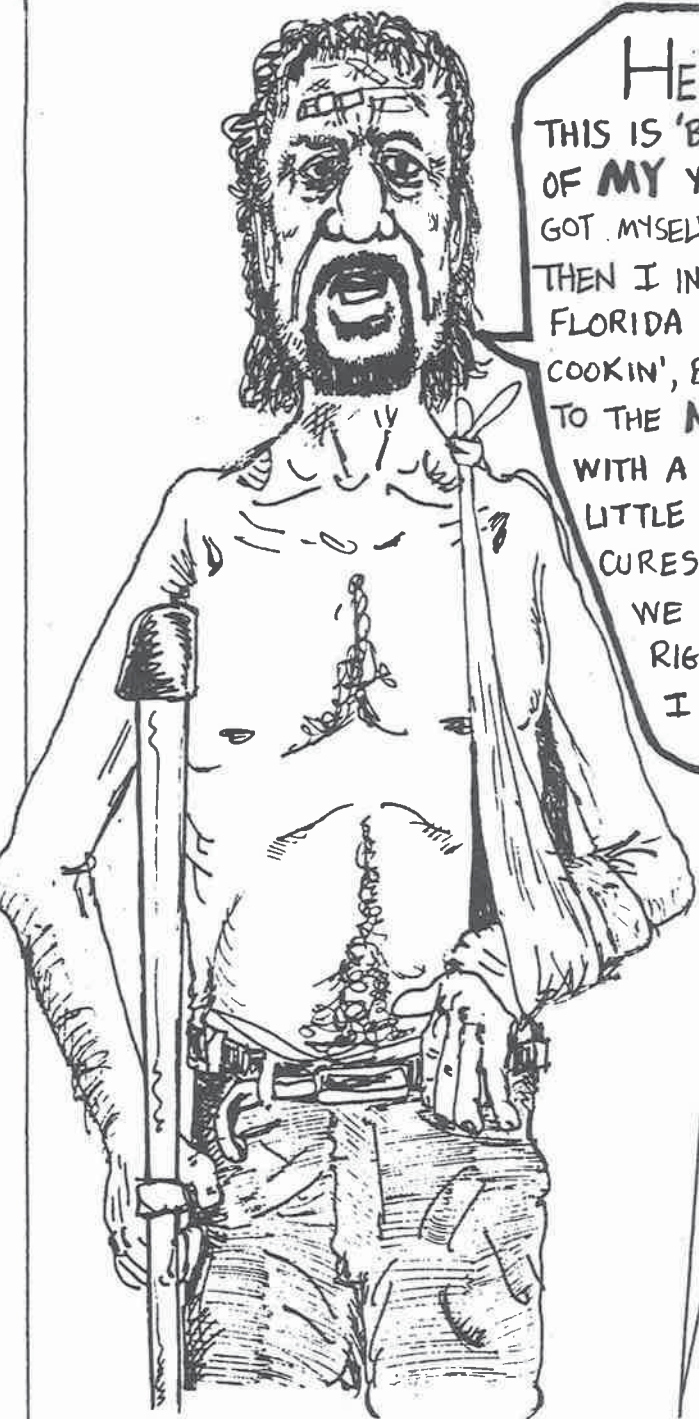
will be sold individually, and aired on a delayed basis, to the Japanese networks.

There has been talk of the UWF opening up and promoting throughout Europe. Many of the foreign performers who work in the mixed matches can develop, and Europe is a fertile ground to recruit new wrestlers. Maeda reportedly met with promoters in New York late in 1989 about promoting a card. But success in the United States would be very difficult.

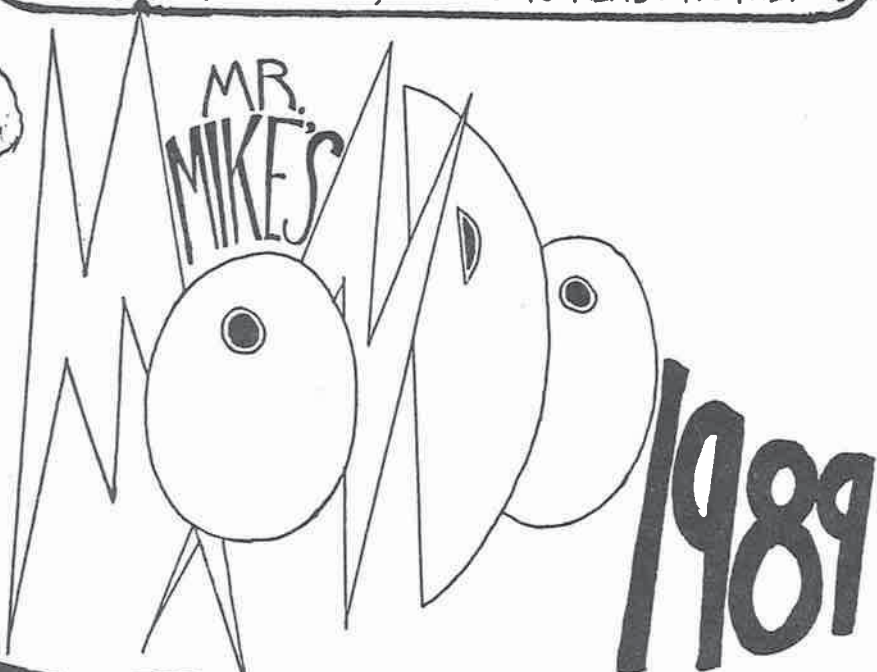
First, the UWF's style wouldn't appeal to the American fans who are programmed toward watching the traditional high spots and enjoy the showmanship, like interviews and flamboyant ring entrances. None of the wrestlers have any name appeal in the United States, and drawing the kind of houses they draw in Japan would be next to impossible.

Results would probably be similar to the Pro Wrestling America card that was held in Fridley, Minn. at the end of 1989. The card, which included a UWF-style match between future UWF wrestlers Wellington Wheatley and Kevin Kastle, wrestled before a packed house of around 325 people. About half of them really enjoyed the match. The other half was bored to death.





HELLO THERE, ALL YOU SIMPLE MINDED PEOPLE, THIS IS 'BIG TEX' TERRY FUNK, WELCOMING YOU TO A REVIEW OF **MY YEAR!** IT WAS A GOOD 'UN TOO, WASN'T IT? FIRST, I GOT MYSELF IN **TOP** PHYSICAL CONDITION, LIKE YOU SEE HERE NOW. THEN I INJECTED A LITTLE LIFE IN THAT FAT INFLATED TOAD'S FLORIDA HUBRIS HOMAGE-- **HEY DUSTY!** YOU MIGHT BE COOKIN', BUT YOU SURE AIN'T BOOKIN'!... THEN I RETURNED TO THE **NWA** WITH MY MEMORABLE ASSAULT ON **RIC FLAIR** WITH A FREEZER-SIZE BAGGIE. NOW DON'T NONE OF YOU LITTLE BOOGERS TRY THIS AT HOME: THERE **OTHER** CURES FOR A BANANA NOSE OR HORSE TEETH! WELL, WE DID HAVE SOME PRETTY GOOD 'OL BRAWLS, TOO... RIGHT UP TO THAT LAST MATCH. ONE THING THOUGH-- I DIDN'T MEAN TO **QUIT** THE MATCH, BUT IT WAS EITHER **THAT**, OR HAVE TO READ ANOTHER...



YEAR **E**ND REVIEW



**LEASE
OF THE YEAR**

AS IN NEW LEASE ON LIFE, 'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT THE **NWA** GOT THIS FIRST YEAR IN THE TURNER EMPIRE. WE SAW INDICATIONS THAT THEY'RE BOTH "IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL", AND THAT SUCH EFFORT IS WORTHWHILE.



**LIST
OF THE YEAR**

WHEN OUR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF MAKES **PWT's** LIST OF "25 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN WRESTLING TODAY" YOU KNOW SOME THINGS WRONG WITH THEIR JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS. THEY MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE SOME.



**LOSS
OF THE YEAR**

WE NOTED WITH TRUE SADNESS THE PASSING OF HOUSTON PROMOTER AND GENUINE HUMAN BEING, **PAUL BOESCH**. MR. BOESCH WAS A RARE PERSON IN A FIELD WHERE ALL OTHERS ARE OVERDONE, AND UNFORTUNATELY ENDED HAVING NO PLACE IN THE WRESTLING BUSINESS. HE RETAINED TO THE END SOME BIZARRE NOTION OF RESPECT FOR THE WRESTLING FAN AND PATRON.

1912 - 1989



ONE THING I'LL SAY ABOUT THE NWA THIS YEAR--THEY TRIED. SOME IDEAS, LIKE USING ME, WE'RE A SUCCESS. OTHERS, WELL... LIKE WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THAT BUTCH REED-ROD SIMMONS PAIR EXCEPT THAT IT WASN'T EVEN THE FIRST CHOICE IN CLEVER NAMES WHEN THEY FINALLY CAME UP WITH THEIR STUNNINGLY CREATIVE TEAM NAME: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE GIVE YOU... **DUMB!**

HEY! THE NAME BE

DOOM!!

OH YEAH, I GOT CONFUSED. WELL, NO MATTER, 'CAUSE THEY **OUTDID** THEMSELVES WHEN THEY ADDED KEVIN SULLIVAN'S FALLEN ANGEL-BIMBO KNOCKOUT FROM THAT ROBIN GREENE GIMMICK. SUCH AN **IMAGINATIVE, UNIQUE** NAME... 'ER, WHAT IS THAT AGAIN??

I... AM... WOMAN

NOW THAT'S
DUMB!



THE NWA BROUGHT IN SOME NEW FACES, SOME OLD FACES, SOME NEW OLD FACES, SOME OLD NEW FACES, SOME OLD OLD FACES, SOME...



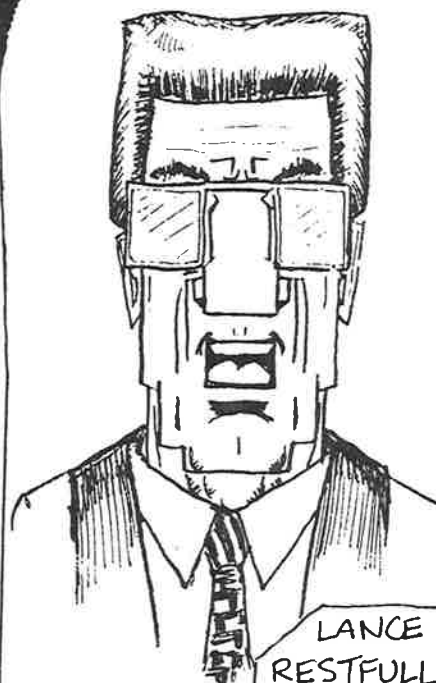
**TRENDY
LONGSHOT**

PROBABLY THE REAL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR FOR 1989 IS THE NWA'S REFEREE TURNED MANAGER TEDDY LONG. HIS IS FAR FROM A DEMAING STEREO-TYPED PORTRAYAL, AND CAME OFF TO US AS VERY SLICK NONETHELESS, SLICK, BUT NOT SLICK. HE HAS A POLISHED VOICE, PROFESSIONAL MANNERISMS AND AN APPROPRIATE PERFECT APPEALATION OF PEANUT HEAD. WE LONG LONG WERE HE IS NOW, AND EXPECT HIM TO GO FAR. HOW 'BOUT SOME MORE "WORLD ACCORDING TO..."S??



**NORMAN
THE LAXATIVE**

ALTHOUGH THE RETARD PREMISE IS CERTAINLY OF DUBIOUS TASTE, IT IS FOR 'RASSLIN ONE OF LONG, HONORED STANDING. THEREFORE WE'RE REALLY NOT OFFENDED BY THIS PRESENT PER-MUTATION PERPETRATED BY THE SINGH-ULAR MIKE SHAW. AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, IT HARDLY USES THE TUB'S TALENTS TO BEST ADVANTAGE. STILL, THIS IS AN AGREEABLE MID-CARD GIMMICK, AND IMPORTANT FOR THE PRODUCT MIX. AND IF THIS IS DERIDED AS "TOO WWF LIKE", WELL, AS FAR AS BUSINESS GOES, IS THAT BAD??



**LANCE
RESTFULL**

ANOTHER NEW FACE WAS AN OLD FAMILAR FACE, AND A WEL-COMED ADDITION INDEED. MEMPHIS ICON LANCE RUSSELL WAS CALLED UPON AT LAST BY THE NWA WHEN CAUGHT SHORT BY TONY SHIVANTO'S WHIFF SWITCH. NO PROBLEM, AS 'OL LANCE IS LONG BEYOND SMOOTH. HIS USE HAS STRUCK US AS MODERATE AND UTILITERIAN, BUT HIS DULCET TONES WILL FILL ANY NICHE. IF ANY DOUBT THE NOSE'S ABILITY OR APPEAL, BE MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT IN LESS THAN A YEAR AWAY FROM MEMPHIS, THAT SHOW IS ALL BUT OVER.

MICHAEL "HO-HUM" HAYES

MICHAEL 'PUG NOSE' HAYES, FINISHING HIS 13th LUCKY YEAR IN THE BIZ, IS A CURIOUS CASE. WE'VE NEVER HEID HIM HERE ON MONDO STREET IN AS HIGH A REGARD AS MOST OTHERS FOR HIS VAST VOCAL TALENTS, YET WE MUST ADMIT HE'S AN UNGANNY PERFORMER LIVE, ABLE EVEN TO GET A REACTION OUT OF AN ANA CROWD. STILL, NO MATTER WHAT HE DOES, IT ALL SORTA SEEMS THE SAME. BABYFACE? HEEL? DOES IT MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE?

WE'LL RESERVE JUDGEMENT ON THE WISDOM OF HIS MONOMANIA IN REFORMING THE FREEBIRDS (THOUGH IT'S ABOUT AS GOOD A USE OF JIMMY GARVIN AS ANY) BUT ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN HIS STINT WITH SUNKFOOD DOG EARLY IN THE YEAR. WHERE'S OTIS SISTRUNK WHEN WE NEED HIM?

SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE, THAT'S FOR SURE!

"CLASHED WITH THE CHAMPION"

FIRST WE'LL ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THAT FORMER FAN TURNED PRO PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY IS AN EXCEPTIONAL MANAGER, PROBABLY AMONG THE TOP THREE (CERTAINLY FOUR) ACTIVE TODAY (AND THE LOOSEST DEFINITION OF "ACTIVE" TOO.) BUT WHY NOT? HIS CHATTER IS FRANTIC, KINETIC, ABRASIVE, ENGROSSING AND HIGHLY DERIVATIVE. BUT HEY! THAT'S OKAY, CAUSE THIS IS AN ENORMOUS TALENT, AND WITH A BIT MORE POLISHING,

(AND WE'RE TALKING A VERY YOUNG GUY HERE, TOO)

AND DEPENDING ON HOW TRAVELI KEEN A WRESTLING MIND HE POSSESSES, HE'LL BE IN AN ANNUAL DEAD-HEAT FOR THE TOP SPOT ITSELF. AHH, THAT IS IF HE CAN KEEP A JOB!

I'M WHAT?

SO WHAT'S THIS THING ABOUT STING, HUH? WE GIVE THE GUY A LOT OF CREDIT FOR SURVIVAL SKILLS. HE CAME TO THE NWA FROM THE UWF BUYOUT AND WAS GIVEN THE EXPECTED SPECIAL TREATMENT. HE GOT OVER ANYWAY, AND EVEN MORE, SHOWED VAST IMPROVEMENT. BY THE END OF LAST YEAR HE WAS ONE OF THE HOTTEST THINGS GOING, AT LEAST CERTAINLY HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT SO, 'CAUSE WHEN PUSH CAME TO SHOVE DURING '89, MR. FOUR YEAR MAN, MR. HAS-A-DECENT-MATCH-WHEN-LED, BUT BRING-THE-BREADCRUMBS-OTHERWISE, 'CAUSE HE'S LOST REFUSED TO PUT OVER AN OPPONENT, ONE INVOLVED IN THE LEAD FEUD AND CRUCIAL PAY-PER-VIEW SHOWS, AND NEEDING QUICKLY ESTABLISHED CREDIBILITY. STING IS GOOD, HAS LOTS OF CHARISMATIC APPEAL AND IS A KEY FOR THE FUTURE, BUT HE 'AINT THAT GOOD. GIVEN A FEW MORE YEARS, WHO KNOWS, HE MIGHT BE AS GOOD AS MANY THINK HE NOW IS.

THE STINKER

TWO UNLIKELY RETREADS THAT RESURFACED THIS YEAR WERE BUZZ "MADDOG" SAWYER, ONCE A MAINSTAY DURING GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP "RASSLIN'S HEYDAY, AND KHOSROW "IRON SHIEK" VAZIRI, NEVER A MAINSTAY ANYWHERE. IN DIFFERENT WAYS WE'VE LONG RESPECTED & ADMIRER BOTH BOYS, AND WISH THEM LUCK. THE SHIEK ESPECIALLY WILL NEED SOME. HE'S FIGHTING AGE, ABUSE, AND UNIVERSAL APATHY TOWARDS A ROLE NO LONGER, WELL, CHIC.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MADDOG IS PRIMED FOR A NICE STINT WE HOPE. HE'S BEEN SO OUT OF THE MAIN-STREAM FOR SO LONG HE'S ALMOST FRESH. THIS ISN'T THE ERA FOR GUYS OF HIS SIZE AND STYLE TO REIGN ON TOP, BUT WE'LL SETTLE FOR SOME SOLID DISPLAYS OF HIS WORKING TALENT AND TIGHT BRAWLING. WELCOME BACK, BAD DUDE!

GETTING A
BUZZ ONCE AGAIN

THE
IRAN
SCHMUCK

WHY IS
MY VOICE
ALWAYS
HOARSE?

AAAWWWRRROOO!

AMAZING WHAT A GUY WHO'S PHYSICALLY APPALLING, AND ANOTHER GUY MENTALLY EVEN MORE SO CAN DO TOGETHER. ISN'T IT? NOT AT ALL AS ANDRE (THE GUY CAN'T) AND VINCE'S ULTIMATE WEARER PROVED ALL YEAR LONG. WHAT A MATCH UP !!! CAN YOU BELIEVE THEY MET FOR OVER FIFTEEN EXHAUSTIVE, ALL-OUT MINUTES? 'COURSE, IT TOOK ABOUT 200 ENCOUNTERS TO ACHIEVE THIS DURATION... IS IT TRUE THAT THE WHIFF CROWDS GOT PISSED-OFF AT THE MICRO-SECOND MATCHES? SOUNDS LIKE A PUBLIC SERVICE TO US. THERE MAY BE ONE GOOD THING THAT COMES OUT OF THIS: EVEN THOSE WHIFF HIRED LIARS WOULDN'T DARE KEEP ON CLAIMING ANDRE AS BEING "UNDEFEATED", WOULD THEY? ...ER, WOULD THEY?? ULP....



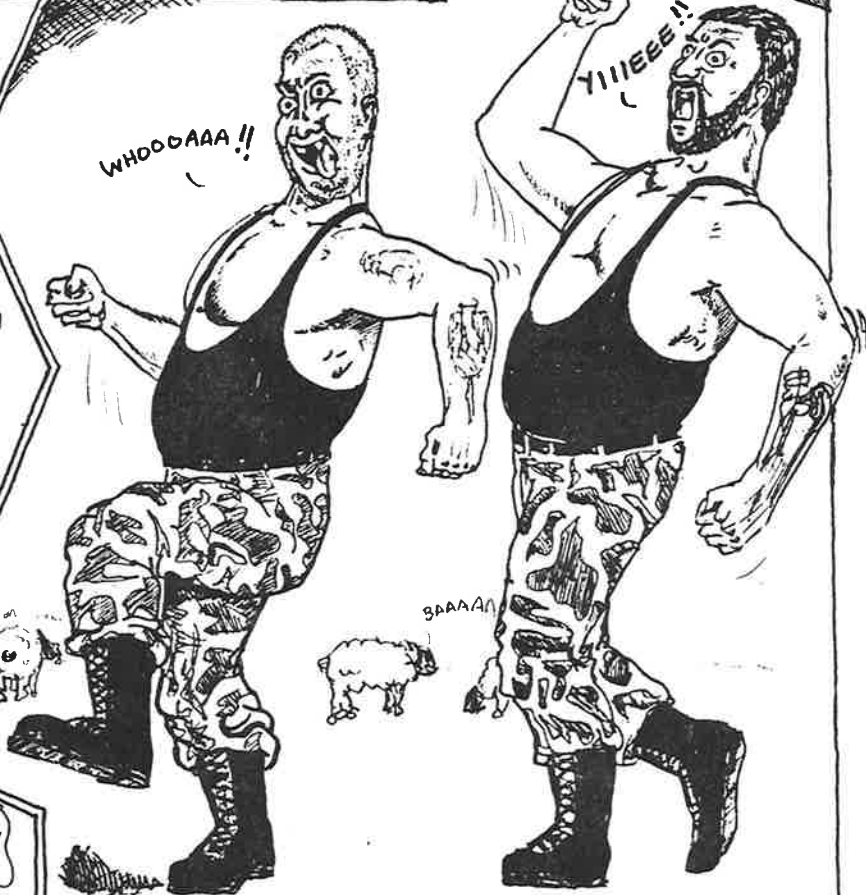
WOW! WHAT A YEAR FOR AMERICA'S FAVORITE MEDIA MYTH AND PHARMACOLOGICAL PHANTASM. LONG BEEN AN ACTOR BEING A WRESTLER, THIS YEAR HE BECAME AN ACTOR BEING A WRESTLER BEING AN ACTOR BEING A WRESTLER AND BY MOST ACCOUNTS WAS ABOUT AS CONVINCING IN HIS NEW ROLE AS HE WAS IN THE OLD. DESPITE THIS, "NO HOAX BARED" AS A MOVIE WAS A PROMOTIONAL SUCCESS, IF NOT FINANCIALLY AS WELL, WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY LEAD TO MORE CELLULOID ABOMINATIONS. HOW ABOUT AWARDS? IF AN OSCAR AWARD IS SOMEHOW OVERLOOKED, THEN CERTAINLY AN EMMY FOR HIS MOVING PERFORMANCE (IT MOVED US TO THE BATHROOM) DURING THE MACHO MAN TURN SKIT ON THEIR FEBRUARY NBC PRIME TIME WRESTLEMANIA SET-UP SPECIAL? PLEASE!! SOMEBODY GIVE THIS GUY A COUNTDOWN OR SOMETHING !!! ARE WE ON ??

CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT BOBBY "THE BANE" HEENAN IS IN HIS SIXTH YEAR AS THE WHIFF'S PRM MANAGER? AND WITH A RAP AND SHICK AS FRESH N' (CLEVER NOW AS IT WAS THEN... WHICH GIVES YOU AN IDEA HOW TAUTOLOGICALLY STALE IT WAS THEN. WELL, TO US ANYWAY, ONLY BECAUSE WE WERE HEARING IT FOR 15 YEARS BEFORE THAT. EVEN SO, HE'S STILL ONE OF THE VERY BEST GOING, THEN OR NOW, AND FRANKLY, WE'RE IMPRESSED WITH HIS LONGEVITY WITH ANOTHER WELL FOCUSED YEAR ENJOINED IN 1989. AGAIN, HE WAS THE WHIFF'S MOST ANGLED MOUTHPIECE, ALMOST AS IF HE WERE THEIR ONLY MANAGER, WHICH, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF JIMMY HART (FOR WHOM THERE SHOULDN'T EVEN BE A QUESTION, BUT WHAT DO THEY EVEN DO WITH HIM?) HE MAY JUST AS WELL BE. 1989 SAW NOT ONLY HEENAN "MANAGING" MORE TITLE HOLDERS THAN IN YEARS PAST, AND CONTINUING TO PERFECT HIS BEFUDDLED VILLAINY AS MONKEY MONSOON'S FOIL, BUT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A NEW HIGH IN LOWNESS: THE NEAR UNWATCHABLE AND ALSO UNWATCHED "BOBBY HEENAN SHOW". YINK DINK, AND BARE



RETURN OF THE BASKET CASE

VINNIE'S FAVORITE BANANAS BOY LEAPED BACK INTO THE CIRCUS THIS YEAR MUCH TO OUR UTTER AMAZEMENT. MORE AMAZING YET IS THE APPARENT BELIEF THERE'S STILL SOME MILAGE LEFT IN THIS EMBER CRISP SHELL OF A ONCE GOOD ACT. WE WERE JUST WONDERING-- ARE THE DRUG TESTS NOW JUST WRITTEN EXAMS ??



THE PUDKNOCKERS, ER', BUSHHACKERS, ER'...

THE BEST NEWS HERE IS, WE'RE NO LONGER AT WAR WITH NEW ZEALAND, LEAST SO FAR AS THIS GEEK ACT IS CONCERNED... BE GRATEFUL FOR SMALL THINGS... ACTUALLY, THIS KIWI GORE NUMBER WAS ABOUT THE LAST ACT WE EXPECTED TO TURN UP IN VINNIE'S CIRCUS, BUT LEAVE IT TO THE MCMADMAN WHO ALONE KNEW TO PRESENT THESE TASTELESS TURKEYS AS SOME SORT OF BENIGN BABYFACE BUFFOONS. SOMETIMES THE OBVIOUS TAKES THE LONGEST TO BE RECOGNIZED, UNFORTUNATELY FOR US.



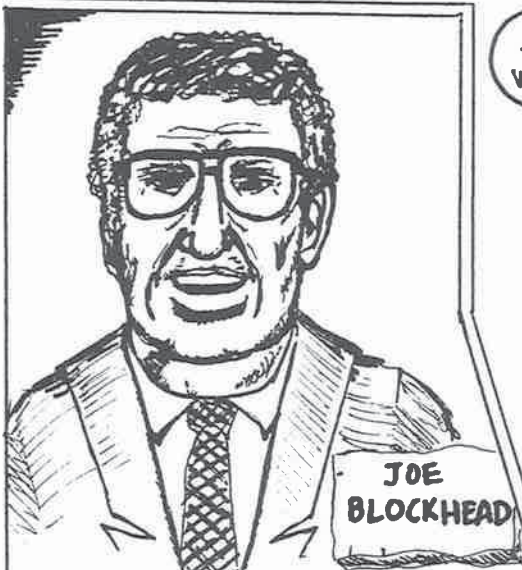
I WORKED FOR THE AWA ONCE... ONCE, BUT THEN I GOT A BETTER PAYING OFFER: ACTOR'S UNEMPLOYMENT MINIMUM BENEFITS. BUT HEY, THAT'S ALL IN THE PAST-- JUST LIKE THE AWA IS! BUT I LIKE VERNE GAGME, I REALLY DO! HE'S THE ONLY GUY AROUND WHO'S RETIRED MORE TIMES THAN ME! I KNOW LOTS 4 BOYS THINK HE'S JUST AN EGG SUCKIN' DOG, BUT I KNOW THAT'S NOT TRUE! VERNE WOULD NEVER SPRING FOR THE CHICKEN!

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THE AWA THAT HASN'T ALREADY BEEN SAID? PLENTY, BUT WE'LL TRY TO BE NICE ANYWAY. AFTER A YEAR LIKE 1989 THOUGH, THIS WON'T BE EASY.

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THAT BIG "SUPERCASH" SHOW FROM LATE '88 WHICH BEGAN OUR OBSERVER WRESTLING YEAR? IT KEPT VERNE GAG-ME'S RECORD INTACT: EVERY CO-OP VENTURE WITH OTHER PROMOTERS UNFAILINGLY ENDS WITH A FALLING OUT CENTERED AROUND THOSE UNIQUE GAG-ME ACCOUNTING METHODS. INSTEAD OF DOUBLE-ENTRY BOOKKEEPING, DOUBLECROSS-ENTRY IS USED. WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THIS GROUP, EVER A FOUNT OF BOOKING CREATIVITY--UNABLE AS USUAL TO MAKE MUCH ADVANTAGE OF WHAT TALENT MIGHT HAPPEN TO BE AT HAND OR EVEN KEEP AROUND MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS? THEY OUTDID THEMSELVES FOR BOTH STUPIDITY AND TASTELESSNESS AND MANAGED TO ENTER THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WITH THAT POINTLESS BUT NOT PAINLESS FEUD 'TWEEN DERRICK DUKES AND COL DEBEERS, ENDORSED BY THE OROON CHAPTER OF THE NAACP. FORTUNATELY FOR NORMAL SENSIBILITIES, THE MATCHES WERE SEEN BY THE USUAL AWA THROGS, SO NOBODY SAW THEM.

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT ANOTHER STELLAR YEAR ENJOYED BY THE AWA IN '89? OL' VERNE MANAGED TO KEEP HIS ONCE MEANINGFUL HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE IN THE FAMILY, SORT OF. HE HAD TO ADD A NEW MEMBER TO DO IT, BUT WHAT THE HECK: HE COULDN'T OFFER THE BELT TO JUST ANYBODY, OR ANYBODY FOR THAT MATTER, 'CAUSE JERRY LAWLER NEVER SHIPPED IT BACK. HE'D ONLY SEND IT F.O.B. MEMPHIS, AND, WELL, YOU KNOW... WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FEW YEARS MAKE, HUH? IN 1993, THEY GROSSED A MILLION BUCKS A MONTH-- WHADDA' SUPPOSE THEY GROSS NOW, BESIDES US FANS, THAT IS ??

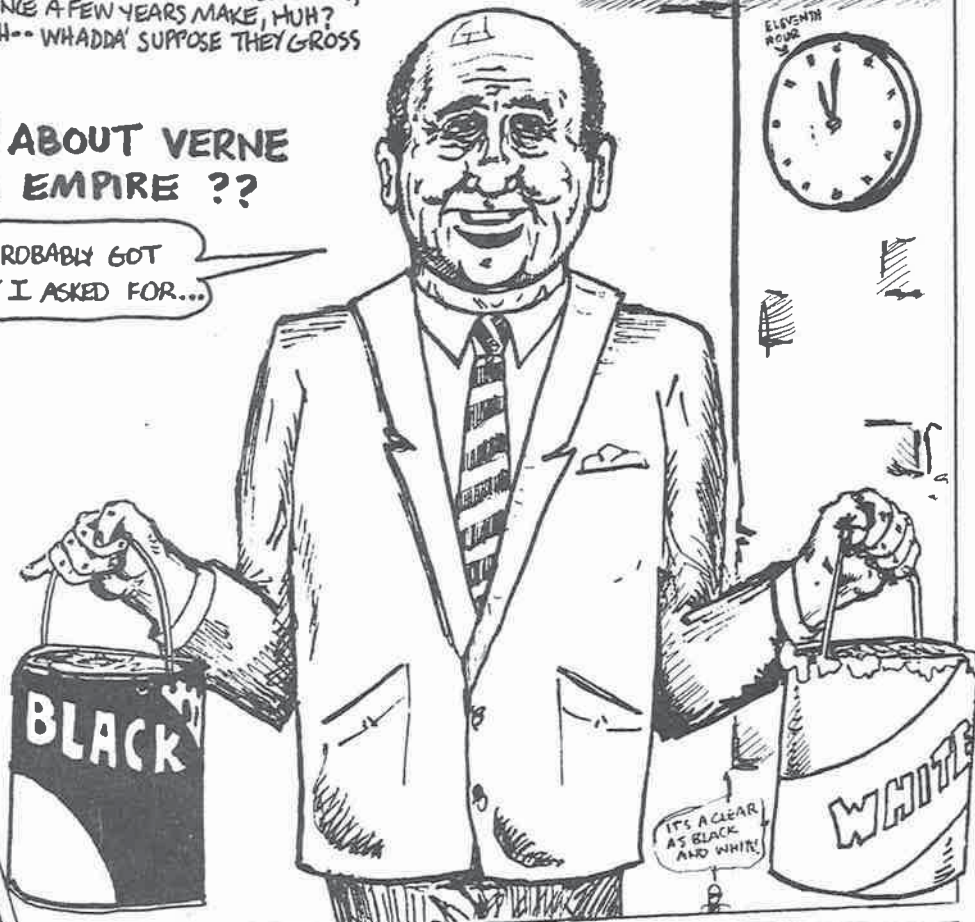
YES... WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT VERNE GAG-ME AND HIS AWA EMPIRE ??



JOE BLOCKHEAD

BIG CONGRATS TO NEW AWA PREZ JOLTIN' JOE BLANCHARD, SUCCEEDING THE 300 YEAR REIGN OF FELLOW TEXAN STANLEY BIRDBRAIN. ALTHOUGH MANY OF TODAY'S FANS BEST KNOW JOE AS PERE TO FILS TULLY, 'OL JOE HAS AN ACHIEVED HISTORY AS A STOOGE FOR VERNE GAGNE, HIGHLIGHTED BY SEVERAL STINTS AS THE "TROUBLE-SHOOTING" REFEREE FOR THE BIG MATCH SKEW-JOB FINISH. YUP-- EVERYTIME TIME HE SHOW'D, IT WAS TROUBLE, AND BEFORE HE FINISHED, WE WANTED TO SHOOT HIM.

I PROBABLY GOT WHAT I ASKED FOR...



'COURSE THINGS WEREN'T ALL DISMAL AND DREADFUL FOR THE AWA IN 1989... THEIR TV SHOW SAW ONE VAST IMPROVEMENT: THE LONG OVERDUE AND ENTIRELY APPRECIATED ELIMINATION OF THE OBNOXIOUSLY OVERLOUD LARRY NELSON. WILL WE MISS HIS FLAILING ARMS, BUGGED EYES, BOUNCING BODY AND INSINCERE CARNY PITCH? NAWWWW...

HAIRY LARRY NETTLESOME

THIS WAS THE YEAR OF LARRYLAND, CLOSED TO ALL SPUDHEADS, BUT FOR US REST, AN AMUSING FREE RIDE. LARRY Z. CAPPED HIS FIFTEENTH GLORIOUS (AND A FEW NOT SO GLORIOUS) YEAR WITH THE AWA TITLE. CALLED UPON TO DO LITTLE MORE WITH IT THAN TALK ALOT, CARRY THE BELT AROUND, AND RARELY DEFEND IT, IT WAS A PERFECT MATCH TO ZYBYSZKO'S TALENTS.



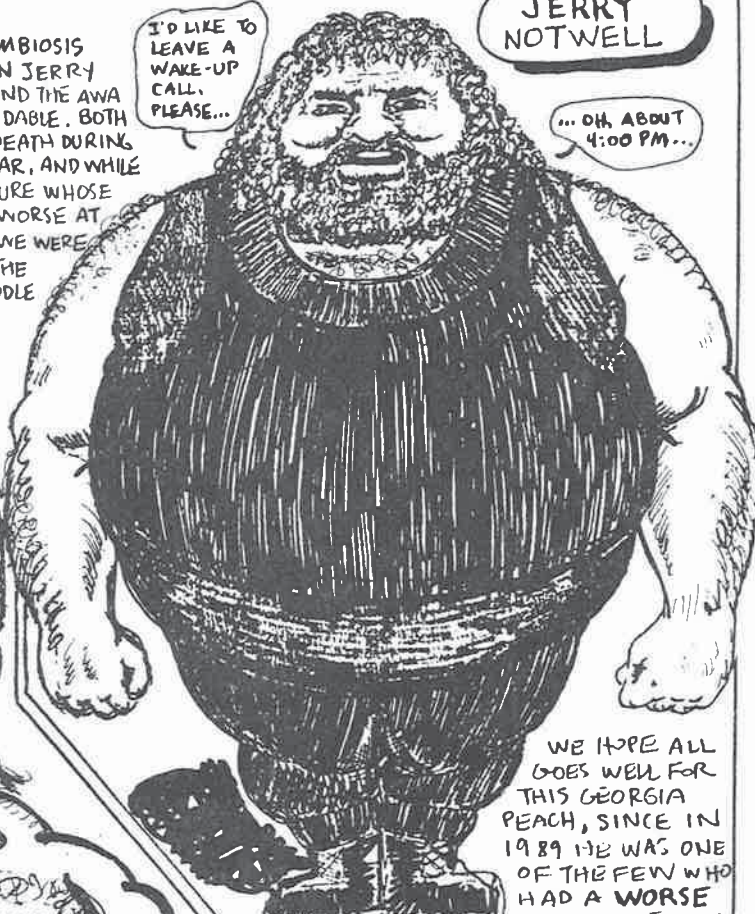
THE SON-IN-LAW ALSO RISES

THE SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN JERRY BLACKWELL AND THE AWA IS UNDERSTANDABLE. BOTH WERE NEAR DEATH DURING THIS PAST YEAR, AND WHILE WE'RE NOT SURE WHOSE HEALTH WAS WORSE AT YEAR'S END, WE WERE GLAD TO SEE THE BIG GUY WADDLE THROUGH THE ROPES ONCE AGAIN.

I'D LIKE TO LEAVE A WAKE-UP CALL, PLEASE...

JERRY NOTWELL

... OH, ABOUT 4:00 PM...



WE HOPE ALL GOES WELL FOR THIS GEORGIA PEACH, SINCE IN 1989 HE WAS ONE OF THE FEW WHO HAD A WORSE YEAR THAN THE AWA

WELL THERE PAHDNAHS, IT'S TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL VISIT TO THE MUSTY TOAD'S DEPARTMENT, WHERE THE NEWS WAS ALMOST AS BIG AS HIS GREAT OVERBLOWN BELLY! FIRST THERE WAS THE CONCERN ABOUT HIS PLANS AFTER THE NWA HANDED HIM HIS \$\$\$... AND WHILE WE ALL KNOW HIS BRIEF FLORIDA

SLIME TIME, IT WAS HIS NEXT MOVE THAT LEFT US, WELL, SORTA ALL FLUSHED UP!



WELL, FORGET THE OLD ARGUMENT ABOUT HEREDITY VERSUS ENVIRONMENT, 'CAUSE BARRY WINDHAM IS PROOF IT'S HEREDITY ALL THE WAY. THE GUY IS AS UNSTABLE AS ELEMENT 109, AND THERE'S NO OTHER EXPLANATION FOR IT. WE USE TO FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE HE'S THE SON OF BLACKJACK MULLIGAN, SINCE BARRY TURNED PRO LITTLE MORE THAN TEN YEARS AFTER BLACKJACK BOB DID, AND BARRY ISN'T A LOW-TALENT SLOB. WE BELIEVE IT NOW THOUGH, AS BARRY STRIVES TO THREATEN HIS OLD MAN'S RECORD OF WALKING OUT ON PROMOTIONS SINCE THE BIZ HAS BECOME THE WAY IT HAS.

GET THE MESSAGE?

BARRY WINDHAM DISPLAYS HIS INJURY TO THE NWA DURING EARLY 1989



BARRY CAN'T AVOID REPEATING HIMSELF. HE MUST BE UP TO THE SECOND, THIRD OR FOURTH TIME FOR EITHER THE NWA OR THE WWF (DEPENDING ON WHO, IF ANYONE, HE'S WORKING FOR THIS WEEK), SO FOR US ALL, IT'S WEARING THIN. YEAH, WE ALL KNOW WHAT A RIDICULOUS WASTE IT IS; HOW WINDHAM IS ALMOST A SURE BET TO BE A FUTURE NWA CHAMP (NO MATTER HOW OFTEN HE'S LIED TO); HOW HE'S UNQUESTIONABLY ONE OF THE TOP TWO OR THREE WORKERS IN THIS COUNTRY, WHEN HE WANTS TO BE, AN SO ON... TOO BAD HE APPARENTLY NO LONGER WANTS TO BE, SINCE, AS OF THIS WRITING IN EARLY 1997, WINDHAM, IT SEEMS, HAS OPTED FOR A MORE REWARDING CAREER. OH WELL, EASY COME, EASY GO.

PRETTY EXCITING THERE FOR AWHILE, WASN'T IT? WHAT WOULD IT BE THAT I DOOOO, IF YOU WHEEL... WOULD I SWALLOW MY PRIDE (LIKE I SWALLOW EVERYTHING ELSE) AND STAY AS ONLY A WRESTLER AFTER LOSIN' THE BOOK?... WOULD I RETURN TO THE WWF AND RELIVE THOSE DAYS OF GLORY OR MEBBE' BE SOMEBODY'S BODY GUARD...? WOULD I STAY WITH JIMMY CROCKETT AND "HELP" HIM AS A BOOKER-BY-PROXY?... WOULD I START MY OWN PROMOTION WHICH WOULD STAR THAT LEGEND OF LEGENDS, NAMELY ME?... WOULD I TAKE ALONG WITH ME ANY KEY PIECES OF CURRENT NWA TALENT, 'SPECIALLY, GOD WILLUN, BARRY WINDHAM, WHO'VE I RAANAISED FROM JUST A PUP??... WOULD I FINALLY GET COSMETIC SURGERY ON MY REVOLVIN' BELLY SPLITCH???

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT -- DUSTY RHODES-THE-AMERICAN-DREAM... STEEEEL --

THE BULL OF THE WOULDSS !!

PIPER'S(THE)PITS...

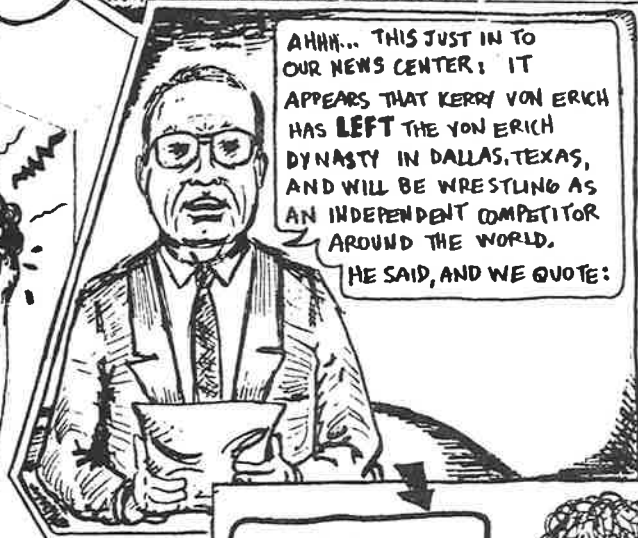
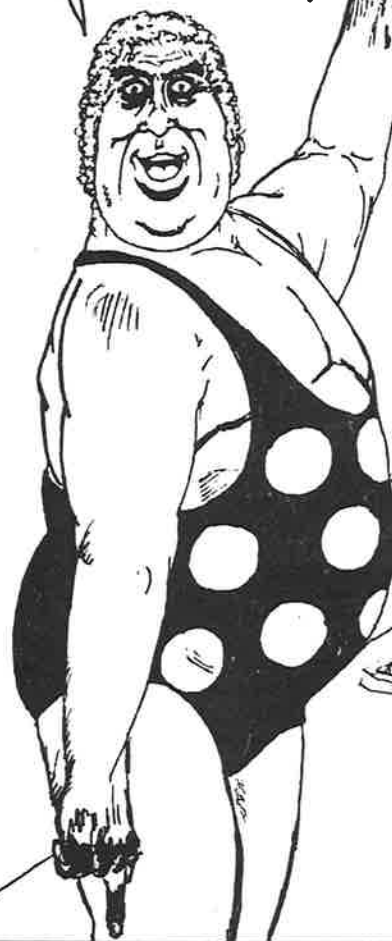
THE LONG AWAITED (THO' NOT BY US) RETURN OF RODDY PIPER FINALLY OCCURED THIS YEAR, AND TO THE UNIF OF COURSE. THIS WAS NO SURPRISE REALLY, EVEN IF THERE WAS SOME SORT OF PRETENSE AT GIVING THE NWA A SHOT AND/OR THEIR TAKING A STAB AT SECURING R.P.'S SERVICES. HAD TO HAVE BEEN SOME PLOY TO MAKE THE WHIFF DEAL A GOOD ONE, WHICH IS TOO BAD. PIPER, RESUMING HIS "BAD BOY" BABYFACE ROLL HAS LITTLE TO OFFER BEYOND REHABED TRASH. IF PIPER DOES HAVE ANYTHING LEFT, AND HAS ANY URGE TO SHOW IT, A CHANGE-OF-SCENE TO NWA SETTING WOULD HAVE BEEN A BETTER CHOICE.



THIS YEAR SAW THE END IN BOTH FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF THE ONCE PROUD WORLD CLASS WRESTLING. 'CAN'T SAY WE'RE SORRY, WHAT WITH THE ENDLESS AND TACKY AIRSICK EMBRY SLEAZE, ALL AIDED AND ABETTED BY THE WELL-NAMED FRANK DUSEK, CAUSE HE DO MAKE US SICK.

BUT WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE...

STEEEEEEL SERVING UP THE SAME OLD SHIT!



AHHH... THIS JUST IN TO OUR NEWS CENTER: IT APPEARS THAT KERRY VON ERICH HAS LEFT THE VON ERICH DYNASTY IN DALLAS, TEXAS, AND WILL BE WRESTLING AS AN INDEPENDENT COMPETITOR AROUND THE WORLD. HE SAID, AND WE QUOTE:



JUST LISTEN TO ME FOR ONE MINUTE...

... UGH, YEAH, IT'S TRUE. "I WILL START ACCEPTING CONTRACTS OUTSIDE OF TEXAS".

WHERE FIRST? I DUNNO.... I THINK MAYBE HOUSTON.



1989 WRESTLING OBSERVER RATINGS

These ratings are based on the results of our annual survey of 36 responding members of our impromptu editorial board. The wrestlers' spot in this year's poll is listed on the left. On the right is where the wrestler finished in previous years polls. These ratings were to be based strictly on in-ring ability displayed throughout the year and work rate.

| | 88 | 87 | 86 | 85 |
|---------------------------|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Ric Flair..... | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2. Jushin Riger..... | 5 | 28 | 65 | -- |
| 3. Ricky Steamboat..... | -- | -- | 8 | 12 |
| 4. Terry Funk..... | 57 | 41 | 15 | 52 |
| 5. Genichiro Tenryu..... | 11 | 27 | 22 | 22 |
| 6. Naoki Sano..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 7. Dan Kroffat..... | 46 | -- | -- | -- |
| 8. Toshiaki Kawada..... | 18 | -- | -- | -- |
| 9. Shawn Michaels..... | 56 | 61 | -- | -- |
| 10. Nobuhiko Takada..... | 7 | 2 | 7 | 27 |
| 11. Arn Anderson..... | 12 | 35 | 46 | 70 |
| 12. Curt Hennig..... | 24 | 12 | 59 | -- |
| 13. Jumbo Tsuruta..... | 32 | 43 | 32 | 33 |
| 14. Akira Maeda..... | 13 | 5 | 10 | 13 |
| 15. Great Muta..... | 25 | 29 | 58 | -- |
| 16. Kazuo Yamazaki..... | 19 | 16 | -- | -- |
| 17. Randy Savage..... | 16 | 19 | 19 | 10 |
| 18. Tully Blanchard..... | 17 | 13 | 13 | 25 |
| 19. Lex Luger..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 20. Owen Hart..... | 6 | 3 | 27 | -- |
| 21. Bret Hart..... | 21 | 17 | 15 | 37 |
| 22. Bobby Eaton..... | 7 | 6 | 5 | 9 |
| 23. Scott Steiner..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 24. Rick Steiner..... | 15 | 52 | 69 | -- |
| 25. Ted DiBiase..... | 4 | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| 26. Terry Gordy..... | 23 | 30 | 6 | 8 |
| 27. Shiro Koshinaka..... | 10 | 25 | 50 | -- |
| 28. Brian Pillman..... | 74 | 72 | -- | -- |
| 29. Barry Windham..... | 3 | 4 | 11 | 67 |
| 30. Rick Rude..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 31. Marty Janetty..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 32. Chris Benoit..... | 32 | -- | -- | -- |
| Samson Fuyuki..... | 42 | -- | -- | -- |
| 34. Sting..... | 26 | 45 | -- | -- |
| 35. Masaharu Funaki..... | 41 | 51 | -- | -- |
| 36. Hiroshi Hase..... | -- | 32 | -- | -- |
| 37. Yoshiaki Fujiwara... | 34 | 24 | 45 | 45 |
| 38. Super Astro..... | -- | 66 | -- | -- |
| 39. Pirata Morgan..... | 39 | 39 | 52 | 51 |
| Negro Casas..... | -- | 36 | 31 | -- |
| 41. Buzz Sawyer..... | 53 | 33 | 17 | 50 |
| 42. Shinya Hashimoto..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 43. Rick Martel..... | -- | 15 | 38 | 18 |
| 44. Riki Choshu..... | 35 | 13 | 9 | 6 |
| 45. Jerry Estrada..... | 67 | -- | -- | -- |
| 46. Brad Armstrong..... | 22 | 20 | 25 | 39 |
| 47. Akira Nogami..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 48. Johnny Smith..... | 70 | -- | -- | -- |
| 49. Big Bossman..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 50. Steve Williams..... | 52 | 34 | 14 | 38 |
| Yoshinari Asai..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 52. George Takano..... | -- | 67 | 54 | 26 |
| 53. Tommy Rogers..... | 29 | 73 | 47 | -- |
| 54. Masa Saito..... | 20 | 9 | -- | -- |
| 55. Atlantis..... | 45 | -- | -- | -- |
| 56. Pat Tanaka..... | 27 | 22 | -- | -- |
| 57. Joe Malenko..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 58. Stan Hansen..... | 51 | 37 | 26 | 4 |
| Super Boy..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 60. Eddie Gilbert..... | 14 | 21 | 62 | 73 |
| Mike Rotunda..... | 36 | -- | -- | -- |
| 62. Emilio Charles..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 63. Dynamite Kid..... | 71 | -- | 29 | 2 |
| 64. Tito Santana..... | 58 | 60 | -- | -- |
| Yoshiaki Yatsu..... | 62 | 40 | 4 | 19 |
| Doug Furnas..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |

| | 88 | 87 | 86 | 85 |
|-------------------------|----|----|----|----|
| 67. Takayuki Iizuka.... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 68. Mark Rocco..... | 66 | -- | 35 | 24 |
| Lizmark..... | 60 | -- | -- | -- |
| 70. Kenta Kobashi..... | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 71. Chris Champion.... | -- | 61 | -- | -- |
| 72. Road Warrior Hawk.. | 64 | 75 | -- | -- |
| 73. Davey Boy Smith.... | -- | 71 | 23 | 17 |
| 74. Tatsumi Fujinami.. | 1 | 8 | 3 | 7 |
| 75. Bam Bam Bigelow.... | -- | 44 | 33 | -- |

Others ranked on three or more ballots:

Eddie Guerrero, Shane Douglas, Bobby Fulton, Tim Horner, Shinichi Nakano, Hiro Saito, Sam Houston, Super Strong Machine, Tom Prichard, Dean Malenko, Big Van Vader, Jeff Jarrett, Masa Chono, SST Fatu, Cactus Jack Manson, El Hijo del Santo, Jerry Lawler, Stan Lane, Billy Travis, Biff Wellington, Dirty White Boy, Dennis Condrey, Danny Spivey

RATINGS NOTES: Ric Flair has finished first eight times in the past nine years. Flair received 26 of the 36 first place votes cast. The remaining first place votes went to Terry Funk (4), Jushin Riger (3), Genichiro Tenryu (2) and Negro Casas (1). . . As with last year, the oldest wrestler to crack the top 75 was Masa Saito (47), while the youngest, for the third straight year, was Masaharu Funaki (20). Also as with last year, the oldest North American to crack the ratings was Terry Funk (45) and the youngest was Chris Benoit (22). . . The highest rated newcomer to the poll was Naoki Sano at No. 6. It also marks the first time in the history of the poll that a wrestler who had never been in the top 75 previously had cracked the top 10. . . The highest rated wrestlers from last year who didn't make it this year were Tiger Mask (No 9), who missed most of the year with major knee surgery, Dick Murdoch (No. 28), Bobby Fulton (No. 31), Stan Lane (No. 33) Biff Wellington (No. 37) and Kengo Kimura (No. 38). . . In breaking down the top 75 by promotion, the NWA once again tops the list with 15 wrestlers, up from 13 last year at this time while it had 17 in the 1987 poll. New Japan has 14, as compared with 10 last year and had 17 the previous year. All Japan also has 14, up from nine last year and seven the previous year. The WWF has 10, as compared with 11 last year and 10 the previous year. Eight are from Mexico (as compared with four the previous two years), five are from the UWF while the AWA and CWA each have one. Currently unaffiliated with any group at press time are Super Boy (Southern California independents), Johnny Smith (formerly Stampede), Brad Armstrong (Southern independents), Chris Benoit (formerly Stampede), Ricky Steamboat (in limbo after leaving NWA) and Tully Blanchard (in limbo after leaving WWF). . . Last year's No. 1 pick, Tatsumi Fujinami, broke a five-year streak in the top ten through missing the last six months with a back injury.

1989 PRO WRESTLING DIRECTORY

| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS | PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------------------|--------------------|
| -A- | | | | | | | |
| JOHNNY ACE | 6-3½ | 238 | 24 | 3 | | Clearwater, FL | John Laurinidas |
| CHRIS ADAMS | 6-0 | 228 | 34 | 12 | | Irving, TX | Chris Adams |
| BRIAN ADAMS | 6-5½ | 295 | 26 | 3 | | | Brian Adams |
| BRIAN ADIAS | 6-0 | 215 | 29 | 7 | | Lake Dallas, TX | Brian Gower |
| PERO AGUAYO | 5-8 | 190 | 43 | 20 | | Mexico | Don Carmona |
| AKEEM | 6-6 | 420 | 29 | 11 | | North Carolina | George Gray |
| GARY ALLBRIGHT | 6-4½ | 310 | 26 | 2 | | Billings, MT | Gary Allbright |
| ARN ANDERSON | 6-1½ | 248 | 31 | 8 | | Rome, GA | Marty Lunde |
| BRAD ANDERSON | 5-11 | 210 | | 2 | | Charlotte, NC | Brad Anderson |
| OLE ANDERSON | 6-0 | 245 | 47 | 23 | | Atlanta, GA | Alan Rogowski |
| ANDRE THE GIANT | 6-10 | 510 | 43 | 25 | | Grenoble, France | Andre Rousimoff |
| ARC ANGEL | 6-0½ | 238 | | 2 | | Charlotte, NC | Curtis Thompson |
| YOJI ANJYO | 5-10 | 195 | 22 | 4 | | Tokyo, JAP | Yoji Anjyo |
| BRAD ARMSTRONG | 5-10 | 220 | 28 | 9 | | Marietta, GA | Robert James, Jr. |
| SCOTT ARMSTRONG | 5-10 | 185 | 30 | 6 | | Marietta, GA | Scott James |
| STEVE ARMSTRONG | 6-0½ | 225 | 24 | 5 | | Marietta, GA | Steve James |
| YOSHINARI ASAI | 5-6½ | 170 | 23 | 3 | | Tokyo, JAP | Yoshinari Asai |
| CUBAN ASSASSIN (NWA) | 6-0 | 238 | | 10 | | Tampa, FL | David Sierra |
| CUBAN ASSASSIN (WWC) | 5-5 | 220 | 44 | 19 | | Cuba | Angel Acevedo |
| SUPER ASTRO | 5-3½ | 160 | 27 | 7 | | Mexico | |
| ATLANTIS | 5-7 | 170 | 26 | 7 | | Mexico | |
| TONY ATLAS | 6-2 | 270 | 33 | 13 | | Roanoke, VA | Anthony White |
| -B- | | | | | | | |
| GIANT BABA | 6-8 | 255 | 51 | 30 | | Niigata, JAP | Shohei Baba |
| HOMBRE BALA | 5-8 | 195 | 37 | 20 | | Mexico | |
| BOB BACKLUND | 6-1 | 225 | 39 | 14 | | Princeton, MN | Robert Backlund |
| THE BARBARIAN | 6-3½ | 295 | 33 | 9 | | San Francisco, CA | |
| NORD THE BARBARIAN | 6-6 | 300 | 30 | 5 | | Anoka, MN | John Nord |
| RON BASS | 6-2 | 285 | 43 | 22 | | Tampa, FL | Ronald Herd |
| BART BATTEN | 5-8½ | 218 | 30 | 7 | | West Virginia | Bart Batten |
| BRAD BATTEN | 5-8½ | 218 | 30 | 6 | | West Virginia | Brad Batten |
| BOTSWANA BEAST | 6-0 | 340 | 29 | 3 | | Georgia | Ben Peacock |
| BRUTUS BEEFCAKE | 6-2 | 250 | 32 | 12 | | Tampa, FL | Edward Leslie |
| CHRIS BENOIT | 5-9 | 220 | 22 | 4 | | Edmonton, ALTA | Chris Benoit |
| VLADIMIR BERKOVICH | 6-2 | 250 | 31 | 1 | | USSR | Vladimir Berkovich |
| BAM BAM BIGELOW | 6-2 | 370 | 28 | 4 | | Asbury Park, NJ | Scott Bigelow |
| BLACKMAN | 5-6 | 160 | 36 | 13 | | Mexico | |
| JERRY BLACKWELL | 5-9 | 430 | 40 | 15 | | Stone Mtn., GA | Jerry Blackwell |
| TULLY BLANCHARD | 5-10 | 228 | 35 | 14 | | San Antonio, TX | Tully Blanchard |
| FABULOSO BLONDIE | 5-10 | 233 | 38 | 10 | | Atlanta, GA | Ken Timbs |
| WAYNE BLOOM | 6-3 | 265 | 32 | 1 | | Minneapolis, MN | Wayne Bloom |
| SCOTTY THE BODY | 5-10½ | 220 | 26 | 3 | | Lake Worth, FL | Scott Levy |
| MATT BORNE | 5-10 | 238 | 32 | 11 | | Milwaukee, OR | Matt Osborne |
| BIG BOSSMAN | 6-5 | 355 | 26 | 4 | | Cobb Co., GA | Raymond Traylor |
| DIRTY WHITE BOY | 6-0½ | 244 | 29 | 12 | | Tennessee | Tony Anthony |
| JONATHAN BOYD | 5-9 | 245 | 45 | 24 | | Australia | John Boyd |
| DINO BRAVO | 6-0 | 265 | 42 | 20 | | Montreal, QUE | Adolpho Brescino |
| BROOKLYN BRAWLER | 6-0 | 230 | 27 | 4 | | Brooklyn, NY | Steve Lombardi |
| EL BRAZO | 5-7 | 190 | 28 | 12 | | Mexico | George Alavado |
| BRAZO DE ORO | 5-6 | 180 | 29 | 13 | | Mexico | Juan Alavado |
| BRAZO DE PLATA | 5-6 | 240 | 27 | 12 | | Mexico | Jesus Alavado |
| KILLER BROOKS | 6-0 | 280 | 45 | 22 | | Dallas, TX | Timothy Brooks |
| BADNEWS BROWN | 6-0 | 260 | 47 | 12 | | Plainfield, NJ | Allen Coage |
| BULLDOG BOB BROWN | 5-10 | 240 | 50 | 31 | | Winnipeg, MB | Robert Brown |
| BRICKHOUSE BROWN | 5-8 | 200 | | 7 | | Miami, FL | Ronald Brown |
| JIM BRUNZELL | 5-10 | 225 | 40 | 17 | | White Bear Lake, MN | James Brunzell |
| THE BULLET | 5-11 | 230 | 52 | 23 | | Marietta, GA | Robert James, Sr. |
| ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER | 6-0 | 400 | 53 | 32 | | Windsor, ONT | Larry Shreeve |
| -C- | | | | | | | |
| LARRY CAMERON | 6-1½ | 255 | 37 | 2 | | Minneapolis, MN | Larry Cameron |
| EL CANEK | 6-0 | 235 | 37 | 17 | | Mexico | S. Estrada |
| DOS CARAS | 5-10 | 215 | 38 | 19 | | Mexico | Miguel Rodriguez |
| NEGRO CASAS | 5-6 | 180 | 28 | 10 | | Mexico | Jose Casas |
| SCOTT CASEY | 5-10 | 240 | 42 | 18 | | San Antonio, TX | Scott Casey |
| STEPHEN CASEY | 6-4½ | 242 | 26 | 9 | | London, England | Stephen Casey |
| STEVEN CASEY | 5-10 | 227 | 25 | 4 | | | |
| HURRICANE CASTILLO JR. | 5-8½ | 208 | | | | San Juan, PR | Daniel Castillo |
| CHRIS CHAMPION | 5-11 | 215 | 29 | 6 | | Tampa, FL | David Smith |
| TODD CHAMPION | 6-5 | 270 | 28 | 4 | | Provo, UT | Todd Brafford |
| EMILIO CHARLES JR. | 5-7 | 180 | 33 | 10 | | Mexico | Emilio Charles Jr. |
| SANGRE CHICANA | 5-9 | 185 | 37 | 16 | | Mexico | Andres Richardson |
| MASA CHONO | 5-10 | 220 | 26 | 5 | | Tokyo, JAP | Masahiro Choono |
| RIKI CHOSHU | 5-10 | 238 | 38 | 16 | | Tokuyama, JAP | Mitsuo Yoshida |
| P.Y. CHU HI | 5-9 | 295 | 42 | 19 | | Jackson, TN | Phil Hickerson |
| CARLOS COLON | 5-9 | 215 | 44 | 24 | | San Juan, PR | Carlitos Colon |

| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|---------------------|-------|-----|-----|---------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| DENNIS CONDREY | 6-0 | 245 | 37 | 16 | Nashville, TN | Dennis Condrey |
| THE CONQUISTADOR | 6-1 | 240 | 29 | 7 | New York, NY | Jose Luis Rivera |
| WENDELL COOLEY | 5-10 | 220 | 28 | 7 | Milton, FL | Wendell Cooley |
| STEVE COX | 6-0 | 233 | 28 | 3 | Tulsa, OK | Steve Cox |
| | | | | -D- | | |
| EL DANDY | 5-8 | 170 | 27 | 9 | Mexico | |
| DANNY DAVIS | 5-6 | 195 | | 12 | | Danny Davis |
| MIKE DAVIS | 6-0 | 215 | 33 | 12 | | Mike Davis |
| ANGEL OF DEATH | 6-5½ | 285 | 34 | 4 | Anaheim, CA | David Sheldon |
| HOSS DEATON | 6-2 | 270 | 34 | 8 | Charlotte, NC | David Jones |
| JOEL DEATON | 6-2 | 238 | 32 | 6 | Charlotte, NC | Joseph Jones |
| COLONEL DEBEERS | 6-4 | 270 | 46 | 19 | St. Joseph, MO | William Wiskoski |
| ABBUDA DEIN | 5-10 | 218 | 27 | 6 | Richmond, CA | Rocky Iaukea |
| AXE DEMOLITION | 6-2 | 280 | | 18 | | William Eadie |
| SMASH DEMOLITION | 6-3 | 295 | 30 | 7 | Minneapolis, MN | Barry Darsow |
| BLUE DEMON JR. | 5-7 | 175 | 23 | 6 | Mexico | |
| STEVE DOLL | 5-11½ | 233 | 25 | 5 | Dallas, TX | Luis Rabadan Steve Doll |
| DOOM #1 | 6-0 | 275 | 30 | 3 | Warner-Robbins, GA | Ron Simmons |
| DOOM #2 | 5-11 | 250 | 35 | 11 | Kansas City, MO | Bruce Reed |
| PAUL DIAMOND | 5-11 | 215 | 28 | 6 | Thunder Bay, ONT | Thomas Boric |
| TED DIBIASE | 6-3½ | 263 | 36 | 16 | Jackson, MS | Ted DiBiase |
| STEVE DISALVO | 6-0 | 290 | 34 | 4 | Los Angeles, CA | Steve DiSalvo |
| JUNKYARD DOG | 6-2½ | 315 | 37 | 11 | Baton Rouge, LA | Sylvester Ritter |
| CHIC DONOVAN | 5-11 | 230 | 42 | 11 | Augusta, GA | Charles Donovan |
| SHANE DOUGLAS | 5-11 | 225 | 25 | 3 | Pittsburgh, PA | Troy Martin |
| HACKSAW JIM DUGGAN | 6-3 | 310 | 36 | 12 | Glens Falls, NY | James Duggan |
| DERRICK DUKES | 6-1 | 230 | 25 | 2 | Minneapolis, MN | Derrick Dukes |
| BILL DUNDEE | 5-5 | 205 | 46 | 18 | Melbourne, AUS | William Dundee |
| | | | | -E- | | |
| CANADIAN EARTHQUAKE | 6-6 | 435 | 26 | 3 | Surrey, BC | John Tenta |
| BOBBY EATON | 6-0 | 220 | 31 | 14 | Huntsville, AL | Bobby Lee Eaton |
| UNCLE ELMER | 6-7 | 410 | 52 | 28 | Philadelphia, MS | Stanley Frazier |
| ERIC EMBRY | 5-9 | 231 | 32 | 10 | Cloverport, KY | Eric Embry |
| MIKE ENOS | 6-2 ½ | 260 | 27 | 1 | Minneapolis, MN | Mike Enos |
| JERRY ESTRADA | 5-9 | 170 | 31 | 12 | Mexico | Jerry Estrada |
| | | | | -F- | | |
| TONY FALK | 5-11 | 237 | 28 | 15 | Nashville, TN | Anthony Felker |
| MANNY FERNANDEZ | 6-0 | 250 | 35 | 11 | San Jose, CA | Manuel Fernandez |
| LA FIERA | 5-8 | 175 | 28 | 12 | Mexico | Alfredo Casco |
| FISHMAN | 5-7 | 180 | 38 | 20 | Mexico | |
| RIC FLAIR | 6-0 | 233 | 39 | 17 | Charlotte, NC | Richard Fliehr |
| BILL FRANCIS | 6-6 | 290 | 38 | 9 | Dallas, OR | William Francis |
| MASA FUCHI | 5-10 | 218 | 35 | 16 | Kitakyushi, JAP | Masanobu Fuchi |
| ROBERT FULLER | 6-4 | 248 | 38 | 19 | Dyresburg, TN | Robert Welch |
| BOBBY FULTON | 5-8 | 215 | 28 | 13 | Chillicothe, OH | James Hines |
| JACKIE FULTON | 5-11 | 218 | 21 | 1 | Chillicothe, OH | John Hines |
| TATSUMI FUJINAMI | 5-9 | 238 | 36 | 19 | Masashi, JAP | Tatsumi Fujinami |
| YOSHIAKI FUJIWARA | 5-11 | 220 | 40 | 17 | Iwate, JAP | Yoshiaki Fujiwara |
| MASAHARU FUNAKI | 5-11½ | 225 | 20 | 5 | Aomori, JAP | Masaharu Funaki |
| JIMMY JACK FUNK | 6-0 | 252 | 29 | 10 | Portland, OR | Jesse Barr |
| TERRY FUNK | 6-1 | 220 | 45 | 24 | Canyon, TX | Terry Funk |
| DOUG FURNAS | 5-9 | 260 | 28 | 3 | Knoxville, TN | Doug Furnas |
| SAMSON FUYUKI | 5-9 | 208 | 29 | 10 | Tokyo, JAP | Masamichi Fuyuki |
| | | | | -G- | | |
| GREG GAGNE | 5-10 | 190 | 41 | 17 | Mound, MN | Greg Gagne |
| JIMMY GARVIN | 5-11 | 220 | 35 | 14 | Tampa, FL | James Williams |
| RONNIE GARVIN | 5-10 | 220 | 46 | 27 | Montreal, QUE | Roger Barnes |
| THE GENIUS | 6-0 | 238 | 35 | 16 | Tampa, FL | Lanny Poffo |
| MIKE GEORGE | 5-11 | 260 | 41 | 20 | St. Joseph, MO | Michael George |
| ROBERT GIBSON | 6-1 | 229 | 32 | 12 | Pensacola, FL | Ruben Kane |
| DOUG GILBERT | 6-0 | 250 | 20 | 3 | Lexington, TN | Doug Gilbert |
| EDDIE GILBERT | 5-9 | 210 | 28 | 11 | Lexington, TN | Thomas Gilbert, Jr. |
| RYUMA GO | 5-9½ | 237 | 33 | 18 | Tokyo, JAP | Ryuma Go |
| JIMMY GOLDEN | 6-5 | 245 | 39 | 21 | Montgomery, AL | James Golden |
| MIKE GOLDEN | 6-0 | 235 | 31 | 9 | Shawnee, OK | Michael Golden |
| TERRY GORDY | 6-4 | 290 | 28 | 14 | Chattanooga, TN | Terry Gordy |
| TATSUTOSHI GOTO | 5-10 | 215 | 33 | 17 | Aichi, Japan | Tatsutoshi Goto |
| MIKE GRAHAM | 5-5 | 190 | 38 | 18 | Tampa, FL | Michael Gossett |
| THE GRAPPLER | 5-10½ | 240 | | 11 | | Len Denton |
| JERRY GRAY | 5-11 | 238 | 26 | 9 | Orlando, FL | Jerry Gray |
| CHAVO GUERRERO | 5-8 | 210 | 39 | 16 | El Paso, TX | Salvador Guerrero |
| EDDIE GUERRERO | 5-9 | 185 | 21 | 3 | El Paso, TX | Edouardo Guerrero |
| MANDO GUERRERO | 5-6 | 195 | 37 | 15 | El Paso, TX | Armando Guerrero |
| HECTOR GUERRERO | 5-11 | 215 | 32 | 12 | El Paso, TX | Hector Guerrero |
| | | | | -H- | | |
| HAKU | 6-1 | 252 | 30 | 12 | Tonga Islands | Uliuli Fifita |
| SCOTT HALL | 6-5 | 275 | 30 | 6 | Orlando, FL | Scott Hall |
| EL GRAN HAMADA | 5-4 | 175 | 39 | 18 | Tokyo, Japan | Hiroaki Hamada |

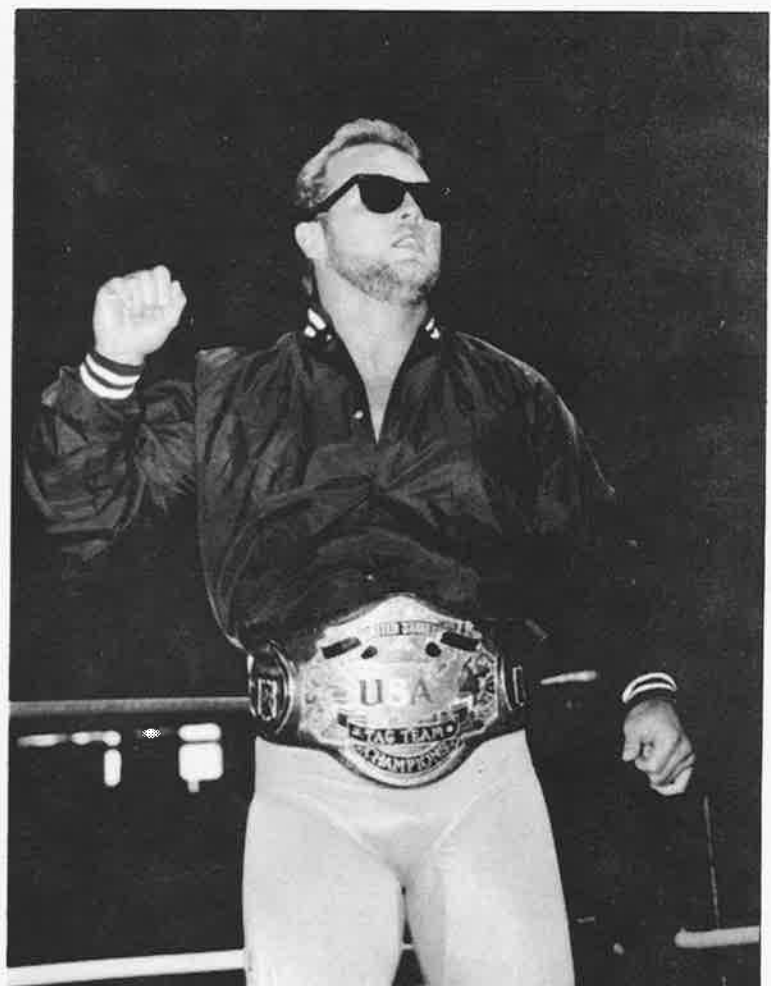
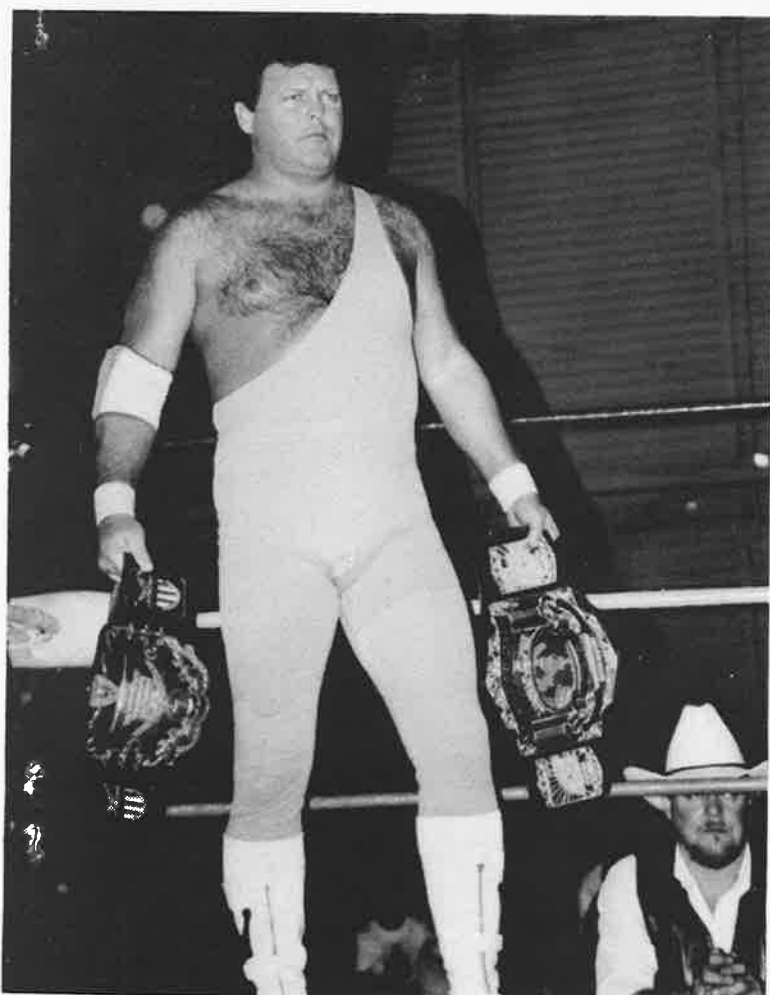
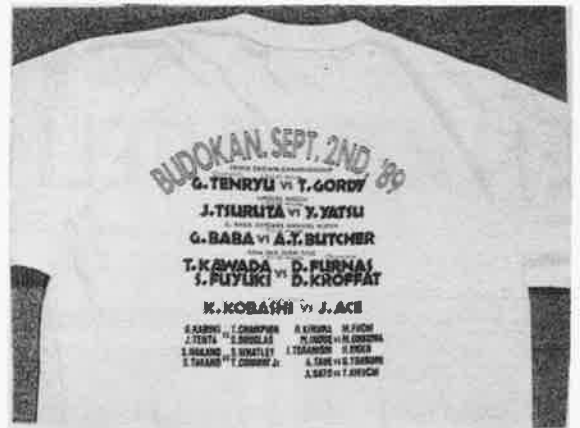
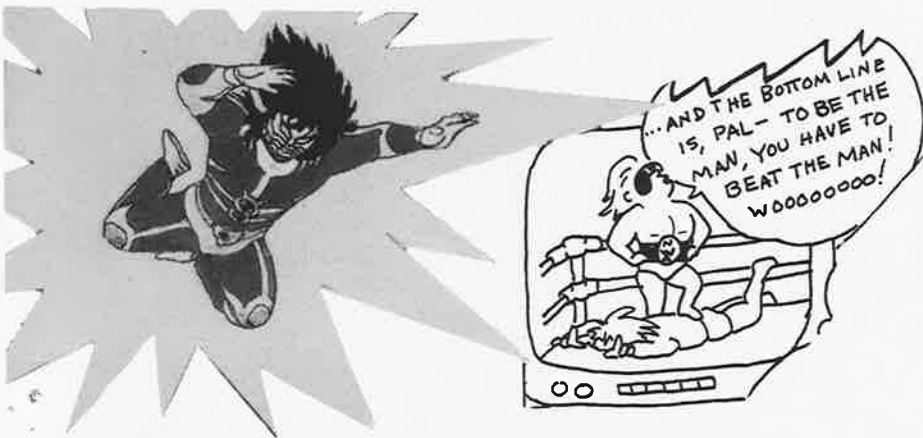
| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|------------------------|-------|-----|-----|---------|---------------------|--------------------|
| STAN HANSEN | 6-2½ | 288 | 40 | 17 | Jackson, MS | John Hansen |
| SUMU HARA | 5-8 | 195 | 25 | 2 | Tokyo, JAP | Tatsumi Kitahara |
| BRET HART | 6-0 | 228 | 32 | 13 | Calgary, ALTA | Bret Hart |
| BRUCE HART | 5-8 | 205 | 37 | 19 | Calgary, ALTA | Bruce Hart |
| OWEN HART | 5-10 | 225 | 24 | 4 | Calgary, ALTA | Owen Hart |
| HIROSHI HASE | 5-11 | 217 | 28 | 4 | Yokghama, JAP | Hiroshi Hase |
| SALMAN HASHIMIKOV | 5-10½ | 270 | 36 | 1 | Moscow, USSR | Salman Hashimikov |
| SHINYA HASHIMOTO | 5-9 | 258 | 24 | 5 | Gifu, JAP | Shinya Hashimoto |
| HIROKAZU HATA | 5-10 | 190 | 25 | 6 | Tokyo, JAP | Hirokazu Hata |
| MICHAEL HAYES | 6-1 | 243 | 30 | 13 | Pensacola, FL | Michael Seitz |
| BILLY JACK HAYNES | 6-2 | 255 | 36 | 7 | Portland, OR | William Haynes Jr. |
| HERCULES | 6-2 | 260 | 32 | 10 | Tampa, FL | Ray Fernandez |
| HULK HOGAN | 6-5 | 295 | 36 | 12 | Tampa, FL | Terry Bollea |
| JONATHAN HOLIDAY | 5-9 | 224 | 24 | 2 | Camden, NJ | Jonathan Holiday |
| NORIO HONAGA | 5-9 | 200 | 33 | 10 | Tokyo, JAP | Nobuo Honaga |
| HONKEYTONK MAN | 6-1 | 248 | 36 | 12 | Bolivar, TN | Roy Ferris |
| TIM HORNER | 5-9 | 225 | 30 | 10 | Morristown, TN | Tim Horner |
| BARRY HOROWITZ | 5-10 | 225 | 29 | 7 | West Palm Beach, FL | Barry Horowitz |
| KANTARO HOSHINO | 5-4 | 165 | 46 | 29 | Kobe, Japan | Kantaro Hoshino |
| SAM HOUSTON | 6-3 | 225 | 25 | 7 | Denton, TX | Michael Smith |
| SPIKE HUBER | 5-10 | 225 | 34 | 15 | Indianapolis, IN | Michael Huber |
| -I- | | | | | | |
| AUSTIN IDOL | 6-0 | 235 | 38 | 18 | Pensacola, FL | Dennis McCord |
| TAKAYUKI IIZUKA | 5-10 | 198 | 23 | 3 | Niigata, JAP | Takahiro Iizuka |
| ANTONIO INOKI | 6-0½ | 210 | 46 | 29 | Yokohama, JAP | Antonio Inoki |
| MIGHTY INOUE | 5-6 | 205 | 40 | 22 | Yokohama, JAP | Sueo Inoue |
| INVADER #1 | 5-9½ | 210 | 43 | 20 | Ponce, PR | Jose Gonzales |
| WILD BILL IRWIN | 6-1 | 260 | 36 | 12 | Duluth, MN | Barney Irwin |
| -J- | | | | | | |
| MIKE JACKSON | 5-7 | 168 | 41 | 21 | Birmingham, AL | Michael Jackson |
| BOBBY JAGGERS | 6-0 | 275 | 42 | 22 | Dunlap, KS | Robert Jeadouin |
| EL RAYO DE JALISCO JR. | 5-11 | 200 | 29 | 11 | Guadalajara, MEX | |
| MARTY JANETTY | 5-10 | 225 | 27 | 7 | Columbus, GA | Marty Janetty |
| JEFF JARRETT | 5-10 | 200 | 22 | 4 | Hendersonville, TN | Jeff Jarrett |
| JASON THE TERRIBLE | 6-4 | 270 | 31 | 11 | Calgary, ALTA | Karl Moffatt |
| HILLBILLY JIM | 6-5 | 285 | 32 | 7 | Bowling Green, KY | James Morris |
| RUFUS JONES | 5-10 | 270 | 48 | 27 | Kansas City, MO | Rufus Lloyd |
| S.D. JONES | 6-1 | 255 | 44 | 27 | Philadelphia, PA | Conrad Efrain |
| COUSIN JUNIOR | 6-1 | 290 | 30 | 7 | Jamestown, KY | Lanny Kean |
| -K- | | | | | | |
| GREAT KABUKI | 5-10 | 230 | 41 | 25 | Miyazaki, JAP | Akihisa Mera |
| TOSHIAKI KAWADA | 5-9½ | 225 | 26 | 8 | Tichigi, JAP | Toshiaki Kawada |
| TEIJO KHAN | 6-0 | 243 | 29 | 4 | Minneapolis, MN | Tom Cassett |
| STEVE KEIRN | 6-0 | 230 | 38 | 16 | Tampa, FL | Steve Keirn |
| DYNAMITE KID | 5-8 | 185 | 31 | 16 | Calgary, ALTA | Tom Billington |
| OSAMU KIDO | 5-8 | 200 | 39 | 21 | Kawasaki, JAP | Osamu Kido |
| KIMALA | 6-5 | 370 | 39 | 15 | San Antonio, TX | James Harris |
| KENGO KIMURA | 6-0 | 230 | 36 | 18 | Ehime, JAP | Takashi Kimura |
| RUSHER KIMURA | 5-11 | 245 | 48 | 25 | Hokkaido, JAP | Masao Kimura |
| REX KING | 5-11 | 200 | 22 | 3 | Tampa, FL | Rex King |
| KOJI KITAO | 6-5 | 310 | 25 | 1 | Yokohama, JAP | Koji Kitao |
| KENTA KOBASHI | 6-1 | 228 | 22 | 2 | Tokyo, JAP | Kenta Kobashi |
| KUNIAKI KOBAYASHI | 5-10 | 220 | 33 | 16 | Nagano, JAP | Kuniaki Kobayashi |
| IVAN KOLOFF | 5-9 | 240 | 53 | 28 | Charlotte, NC | James Parris |
| NIKITA KOLOFF | 6-2 | 245 | 30 | 6 | Concord, NC | Scott Simpson |
| KONAN THE BARBARIAN | 5-11 | 235 | 25 | 2 | San Diego, CA | Carlos Espata |
| SHIRO KOSHINAKA | 5-10 | 217 | 31 | 11 | Tokyo, JAP | Shiro Koshinaka |
| DAN KROFFAT | 5-11 | 223 | 26 | 7 | Calgary, ALTA | Dan Kroffat |
| -L- | | | | | | |
| FRANKIE LANCASTER | 6-1 | 239 | 29 | 7 | Atlanta, GA | Frankie Lancaster |
| BUDDY LANDEL | 6-0 | 235 | 28 | 10 | Knoxville, TN | William Landel |
| STAN LANE | 6-0 | 235 | 36 | 12 | Myrtle Beach, SC | Stan Lane |
| TOMMY LANE | 5-9 | 220 | 34 | 7 | | Tommy Lane |
| JERRY LAWLER | 5-10 | 224 | 40 | 19 | Memphis, TN | Jerry Lawler |
| BRIAN LEE | 6-4 | 250 | 23 | 2 | Orlando, FL | Brian Harris |
| JOS LEDUC | 6-1 | 270 | 44 | 25 | Montreal, QUE | Jos LeDuc |
| LIZMARK | 5-7 | 170 | 39 | 14 | Mexico | Juan Banos |
| LEX LUGER | 6-4 | 258 | 31 | 4 | Tampa, FL | Larry Prohl |
| -M- | | | | | | |
| SUPER STRONG MACHINE | 6-0 | 248 | 33 | 12 | Kanagawa, JAP | Junji Hirata |
| AL MADRIL | 6-0 | 235 | 38 | 18 | San Bernadino, CA | Alberto Madril |
| AKIRA MAEDA | 6-3 | 238 | 30 | 12 | Osaka, JAP | Akira Maeda |
| DEAN MALENKO | 5-8½ | 190 | 29 | 8 | Tampa, FL | Dean Simon |
| JOE MALENKO | 5-9½ | 200 | 33 | 12 | Tampa, FL | Joe Simon |
| CACTUS JACK MANSON | 6-1½ | 248 | 25 | 2 | Setauket, NY | Michael Foley |
| DUTCH MANTELL | 5-11 | 235 | 37 | 15 | Birmingham, AL | Wayne Kowan |
| RICK MARTEL | 5-11 | 235 | 33 | 18 | Quebec City, QUE | Richard Vignault |
| MIL MASCARAS | 5-10 | 230 | 51 | 25 | Mexico City | Aaron Rodriguez |

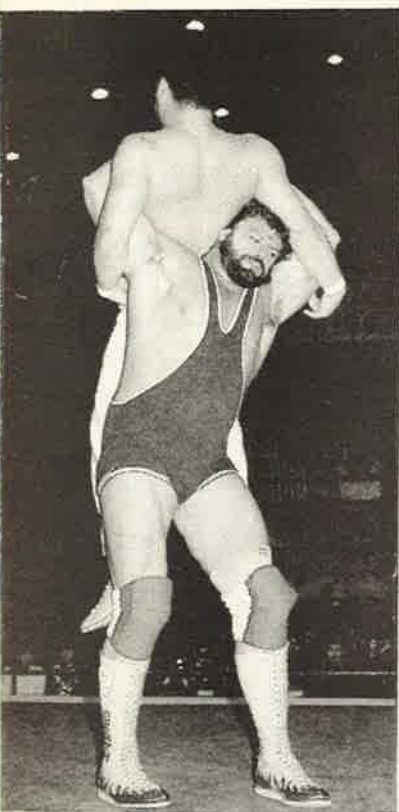
| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS | PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|---------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------|--------------------|
| DRAGON MASTER | 6-0 | 228 | 41 | 19 | | Abashiri, JAP | Kazuo Sakurada |
| KOKINA MAXIMUS | 6-3 | 420 | 23 | 5 | | San Francisco, CA | Kokina Anoaia |
| SUPER MEDICO | 5-10 | 230 | 43 | 13 | | New York, NY | Carlos Estrada |
| SHAWN MICHAELS | 6-0 | 228 | 24 | 6 | | San Antonio, TX | Mike Hickenbottom |
| BUTCH MILLER | 5-8 | 238 | 45 | 22 | | Australia | Robert Miller |
| MITSUO MOMOTA | 5-8 | 200 | 41 | 19 | | Osaka, JAP | Mitsuo Momota, Jr. |
| MOONDOG MORETTI | 5-7 | 250 | 32 | 15 | | Canby, OR | Ed Giovanetti |
| PIRATA MORGAN | 5-8 | 205 | 27 | 10 | | Mexico | Ramon Morgan |
| RIP MORGAN | 6-4½ | 280 | | 6 | | Auckland, NZ | |
| JERRY MORROW | 6-0 | 232 | 40 | 19 | | Martinique | Jerry Morrow |
| RICKY MORTON | 5-9 | 205 | 33 | 11 | | Nashville, TN | Richard Morton |
| TODD MORTON | 5-5½ | 190 | 22 | 2 | | Nashville, TN | |
| KAREEM MUHAMMAD | 6-4 | 400 | 38 | 16 | | Atlanta, GA | Ray Canty |
| BLACKJACK MULLIGAN | 6-5 | 280 | 48 | 21 | | Tampa, FL | Robert Windham |
| DON MURACO | 6-2 | 280 | 41 | 20 | | Honolulu, HI | Don Muraco |
| DICK MURDOCH | 6-3 | 278 | 44 | 25 | | Canyon, TX | Richard Murdoch |
| GREAT MUTA | 6-1½ | 233 | 27 | 5 | | Tokyo, JAP | Keiji Muto |
| -N- | | | | | | | |
| SHINICHI NAKANO | 5-9 | 205 | 26 | 9 | | Niigata, JAP | Shinichi Nakano |
| TATSUO NAKANO | 5-7 | 218 | 24 | 4 | | Tokyo, JAP | Tatsuo Nakano |
| RIKKI NELSON | 5-9½ | 205 | 24 | 3 | | Knoxville, TN | Rikki Nelson |
| JIM NEIDHART | 6-0 | 275 | 34 | 11 | | Tampa, FL | James Neidhart |
| BRIAN NOBBS | 6-2 | 270 | 25 | 3 | | Allentown, PA | Brian Nobbs |
| AKIRA NOGAMI | 5-10 | 190 | 23 | 4 | | Yokohama, JAP | Akira Nogami |
| NORMAN | 6-0 | 350 | 32 | 11 | | Saginaw, MI | Michael Shaw |
| SCOTT NORTON | 5-11 | 320 | 27 | 1 | | Minneapolis, MN | Scott Norton |
| -O- | | | | | | | |
| RIP OLIVER | 6-0 | 245 | 37 | 14 | | Hermasossa, FL | Richard Oliver |
| YOSHINARI OGAWA | 5-8½ | 190 | 23 | 4 | | Tichigi, JAP | Yoshinari Ogawa |
| ATSUSHI ONITA | 5-9½ | 210 | 32 | 13 | | Tokyo, JAP | Atsushi Onita |
| BOB ORTON | 6-3 | 265 | 39 | 19 | | Tampa, FL | Robert Orton, Jr. |
| -P- | | | | | | | |
| MASTER OF PAIN | 6-7 | 285 | 27 | 2 | | | Mark Calaway |
| ICEMAN KING PARSONS | 5-9 | 230 | 40 | 10 | | St. Louis, MO | King Parsons |
| KEN PATERA | 6-0 | 265 | 47 | 17 | | Portland, OR | Kenneth Patera |
| AL PEREZ | 6-1 | 239 | 29 | 8 | | Tampa, FL | Alex Perez |
| MIGUELITO PEREZ | 6-0½ | 248 | 26 | 4 | | San Juan, PR | Jose Perez, Jr. |
| MR. PERFECT | 6-2½ | 243 | 31 | 10 | | Robbinsdale, MN | Curt Hennig |
| D.J. PETERSON | 6-2½ | 235 | 26 | 5 | | St. Joseph, MO | David Peterson |
| DARRYL PETERSON | 6-5 | 310 | 27 | 3 | | Salt Lake City, UT | Darryl Peterson |
| BRIAN PILLMAN | 5-10 | 218 | 27 | 3 | | Norwood, OH | Brian Pillman |
| MR. POGO | 5-11 | 239 | 38 | 18 | | Yamanishi, JAP | Tetsuo Sekigawa |
| JIM POWERS | 5-10 | 225 | 26 | 5 | | New Jersey | James Manley |
| TOM PRICHARD | 5-9 | 220 | 30 | 11 | | Houston, TX | Tom Prichard |
| -R- | | | | | | | |
| HARLEY RACE | 6-0 | 245 | 46 | 30 | | Leawood, KS | Harley Race |
| STEVE REGAL | 6-0 | 205 | 34 | 12 | | Indianapolis, IN | Steve Regal |
| BRAD RHEINGANS | 5-9 | 238 | 36 | 9 | | Appleton, WI | Brad Rheingans |
| DUSTIN RHODES | 6-5 | 260 | 20 | 1 | | Tampa, FL | Dustin Runnels |
| DUSTY RHODES | 6-0 | 330 | 44 | 24 | | Austin, TX | Virgil Runnels |
| RICKY RICE | 6-1 | 230 | 26 | 3 | | Edina, MN | Ricky Rice |
| DAVEY RICH | 5-11 | 230 | 30 | 8 | | Memphis, TN | David Haskins |
| JOHNNY RICH | 6-0 | 238 | 29 | 8 | | Hendersonville, TN | John Richardson |
| TOMMY RICH | 6-0 | 238 | 33 | 15 | | Hendersonville, TN | Tom Richardson |
| JUSHIN RIGER | 5-4½ | 195 | 25 | 6 | | Hiroshima, JAP | Keiichi Yamada |
| ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL | 6-0 | 290 | 30 | 7 | | Minneapolis, MN | Joe Laurinidas |
| ROAD WARRIOR HAWK | 6-2½ | 275 | 32 | 7 | | Minneapolis, MN | Michael Hegstrand |
| JAKE ROBERTS | 6-5 | 250 | 34 | 13 | | Stone Mtn., GA | Aurelian Smith Jr |
| MACDUFF ROESCH | 6-1½ | 238 | 29 | 3 | | Ft. Lauderdale, FL | David Roesch |
| GOLDIE ROGERS | 5-10 | 200 | 39 | 17 | | | David Sherwin |
| RIP ROGERS | 6-0 | 220 | 34 | 11 | | Seymour, IN | |
| TOMMY ROGERS | 5-8 | 190 | 28 | 9 | | St. Petersburg, FL | Thomas Couch |
| PAUL ROMA | 5-9 | 228 | 29 | 7 | | Kensington, NY | Paul Centopani |
| RED ROOSTER | 6-0 | 230 | 34 | 11 | | Vero Beach, FL | Paul Taylor |
| BUDDY ROSE | 5-11 | 355 | 40 | 16 | | Minneapolis, MN | Paul Perschmann |
| RANDY ROSE | 6-1 | 230 | 38 | 15 | | Atlanta, GA | |
| RANGER ROSS | 6-1½ | 225 | 29 | 3 | | Acworth, GA | |
| MIKE ROTUNDA | 6-2 | 243 | 31 | 8 | | Syracuse, NY | Lawrence Rotunda |
| JACQUES ROUGEAU | 6-2 | 225 | 29 | 13 | | Montreal, QUE | James Rougeau |
| RAYMOND ROUGEAU | 6-0 | 233 | 34 | 19 | | Montreal, QUE | Raymond Rougeau |
| NELSON ROYAL | 5-8 | 225 | 58 | 34 | | Mooreville, NC | Nelson Royal |
| RICK RUDE | 6-4 | 235 | 31 | 6 | | Minneapolis, MN | Richard Rood |
| -S- | | | | | | | |
| TONY ST. CLAIR | 6-1 | 210 | 39 | 22 | | London, ENG | Tony St. Clair |
| HIRO SAITO | 5-8 | 228 | 28 | 12 | | Kawasaki, JAP | Hiroyuki Saito |
| MASA SAITO | 5-11 | 250 | 47 | 25 | | Tokyo, JAP | Masanori Saito |
| DAVID SAMMARTINO | 5-8 | 212 | 30 | 11 | | Pittsburgh, PA | David Sammartino |

| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|---------------------|------|-----|-----|---------|--------------------|---------------------|
| AFA THE WILD SAMOAN | 6-1 | 315 | 46 | 20 | San Francisco, CA | Afa Anoaia |
| WILD SAMOAN FATU | 6-0 | 295 | 23 | 4 | San Francisco, CA | Solofa Fatu |
| WILD SAMOAN SAMU | 6-3 | 290 | 26 | 8 | San Francisco, CA | Samula Anoaia |
| WILD SAMOAN SAVAGE | 6-0 | 280 | 24 | 6 | San Francisco, CA | Sam Fatu |
| NAOKI SANO | 5-9 | 195 | 24 | 6 | Tokyo, JAP | Naoki Sano |
| RICKY SANTANA | 5-10 | 228 | 28 | 7 | Miami, FL | Aldo Ortiz |
| TITO SANTANA | 6-2½ | 235 | 35 | 13 | Mission, TX | Merced Solis |
| EL HIJO DEL SANTO | 5-3 | 150 | 26 | 7 | Mexico | Rudolfo Huerta, Jr. |
| KENSUKE SASAKI | 5-9 | 205 | 23 | 4 | Japan | Kensuke Sasaki |
| SHINJI SASAZAKI | 5-10 | 227 | 24 | 6 | Nagasaki, JAP | Shinji Sasazaki |
| EL SATANICO | 5-8 | 175 | 40 | 16 | Mexico | |
| AKIO SATO | 5-8 | 208 | 35 | 19 | Hokkaido, JAP | Akio Sato |
| RANDY SAVAGE | 6-1 | 230 | 37 | 15 | Tampa, FL | Randy Poffo |
| JOE SAVOLDI | 5-9 | 210 | 32 | 9 | Parsippany, NJ | Joe Farini |
| BRETT SAWYER | 5-5 | 210 | 29 | 9 | St. Petersburg, FL | Brètt Moyan |
| BUZZ SAWYER | 5-9 | 260 | 30 | 11 | St. Petersburg, FL | Bruce Moyan |
| LEE SCOTT | 5-10 | 195 | | 1 | | |
| JERRY SEGANOVICH | 6-3 | 260 | 25 | 3 | Allentown, PA | Jerry Seganovich |
| MIKE SHARPE | 6-2 | 250 | 39 | 16 | Hamilton, ONT | Mike Sharpe, Jr. |
| IRON SHEIK | 6-0 | 275 | 50 | 17 | Teheran, Iran | Khosrow Vaziri |
| SCHAUN SIMPSON | 5-9 | 195 | 23 | 3 | Cape Town, SA | Schaun Cohen |
| STEVE SIMPSON | 6-0 | 205 | 26 | 6 | Cape Town, SA | Steven Cohen |
| TIGER JEET SINGH | 6-0 | 250 | 46 | 25 | Toronto, ONT | Daro Singh, Jr. |
| DICK SLATER | 6-0 | 238 | 37 | 18 | Tampa, FL | Van Slater |
| SGT. SLAUGHTER | 6-2 | 315 | 41 | 17 | Wilmar, CT | Robert Remus |
| NORMAN SMILEY | 5-11 | 218 | 24 | 5 | Miami Beach, FL | Norman Smiley |
| DAVEY BOY SMITH | 5-10 | 263 | 27 | 12 | Calgary, ALTA | David Smith |
| JOHNNY SMITH | 5-10 | 237 | 25 | 4 | Calgary, ALTA | |
| TRACY SMOTHERS | 6-2 | 230 | 26 | 7 | Springfield, TN | Tracy Smothers |
| JIMMY SNUKA | 5-10 | 245 | 46 | 20 | Honolulu, HI | James Reiher |
| DOUG SOMERS | 6-2 | 247 | 39 | 18 | Minneapolis, MN | Doug Somerson |
| DANNY SPIVEY | 6-7 | 280 | 33 | 6 | Tampa, FL | Dan Spivey |
| ITALIAN STALLION | 5-11 | 255 | 32 | 7 | Ann Arbor, MI | Gary Quartanelli |
| MARK STARR | 6-2 | 230 | 25 | 4 | Tampa, FL | Mark Smith |
| RON STARR | 5-11 | 235 | 39 | 21 | Baton Rouge, LA | Eugene Nutt |
| RICKY STEAMBOAT | 5-10 | 223 | 36 | 14 | Charlotte, NC | Richard Blood |
| VIC STEAMBOAT | 5-10 | 210 | 28 | 4 | Tampa, FL | Victor Blood |
| ADRIAN STREET | 5-6 | 220 | 48 | 28 | England | Adrian Street |
| RICK STEINER | 5-10 | 250 | 28 | 5 | Bay City, MI | Rob Rechsteiner |
| SCOTT STEINER | 6-0½ | 252 | 27 | 4 | Bay City, MI | Scott Rechsteiner |
| STING | 6-2 | 248 | 30 | 4 | Los Angeles, CA | Steven Borden |
| JERRY STUBBS | 5-11 | 235 | 39 | 15 | Pensacola, FL | Jerry Stubbs |
| BIG JOHN STUDD | 6-7 | 340 | 41 | 18 | Butler, PA | John Minton |
| KEVIN SULLIVAN | 5-6 | 248 | 40 | 20 | Cambridge, MA | Kevin Sullivan |
| MINORU SUZUKI | 5-9 | 205 | 26 | 2 | Japan | Minoru Suzuki |
| -T- | | | | | | |
| NOBUHIKO TAKADA | 5-11 | 227 | 27 | 9 | Yokohama, JAP | Nobuhiko Takada |
| ISAO TAKAGI | 6-0 | 238 | 28 | 3 | Tokyo, JAP | Isao Takagi |
| GEORGE TAKANO | 6-0 | 239 | 31 | 13 | Iwakuni, JAP | Gyoji Takano |
| SHUNJI TAKANO | 6-5 | 245 | 25 | 8 | Iwakuni, JAP | Shunji Takano |
| SOUL TAKER | 6-4½ | 285 | 28 | 1 | Manturn, NJ | Charles Wright |
| PAT TANAKA | 5-7 | 190 | 26 | 4 | Tampa, FL | Patric Tanaka |
| AKIRA TAUE | 6-1 | 230 | 28 | 2 | Tokyo, JAP | Akira Taue |
| GENICHIRO TENRYU | 6-1 | 249 | 39 | 13 | Katsuyama, JAP | Genichiro Shimade |
| ISAMU TERANISHI | 5-7 | 198 | 43 | 19 | Tokyo, JAP | Isamu Teranishi |
| THE TERMINATOR | 6-1 | 255 | 23 | 3 | Minneapolis, MN | Marc Laurinidas |
| BLACK TIGER | 5-8 | 190 | 38 | 18 | England | Mark Hussey |
| TIGER MASK | 5-11 | 225 | 27 | 9 | Saitama, JAP | Mitsuahara Misawa |
| TUGBOAT THOMAS | 6-7 | 395 | 33 | 5 | Huntington, WV | Fred Ottman |
| TNT | 6-0 | 235 | 24 | 5 | San Juan, PR | Juan Rivera |
| JUMBO TSURUTA | 6-4 | 268 | 38 | 17 | Yamanishi, JAP | Tomomi Tsuruta |
| GORO TSURUMI | 5-11 | 260 | 41 | 19 | Yokohama, JAP | Goro Tsurumi |
| -U- | | | | | | |
| ULTRAMAN | 5-6 | 160 | 38 | 20 | Mexico | |
| SOLDAD USTINOV | 6-5 | 280 | 27 | 3 | Minneapolis, MN | Jim Lanning |
| -V- | | | | | | |
| BIG VAN VADER | 6-3 | 335 | 33 | 4 | Boulder, CO | Leon White |
| GREG VALENTINE | 6-0 | 248 | 41 | 21 | Tampa, FL | John Wisniski, Jr. |
| VINNIE VALENTINO | 5-9 | 205 | 31 | 9 | New York, NY | |
| JIMMY VALIANT | 6-1 | 245 | 47 | 21 | Charlotte, NC | James Valen |
| EL VERDUGO | 5-8½ | 205 | 25 | 6 | Mexico | |
| SID VICIOUS | 6-8 | 305 | 29 | 3 | West Memphis, AR | Sidney Eudy |
| JACKO VICTORY | 6-3 | 278 | 27 | 5 | New Jersey | Ken Rinehurst |
| VILLANO III | 5-7 | 175 | 37 | 19 | Mexico | Arturo Mendoza |
| NIKOLAI VOLKOFF | 6-3 | 285 | 42 | 22 | Yugoslovia | Josip Peruzovic |
| KEVIN VON ERICH | 6-2 | 220 | 32 | 14 | Lake Dallas, TX | Kevin Adkisson |
| KERRY VON ERICH | 6-1½ | 265 | 29 | 12 | Lake Dallas, TX | Kerry Adkisson |
| BARON VON RASCHKE | 6-2 | 245 | 48 | 25 | Minneapolis, MN | James Raschke |

| NAME | HT | WT | AGE | YRS PRO | HOMETOWN | REAL NAME |
|---|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| -W- | | | | | | |
| OTTO WANZ | 6-2 | 395 | 47 | 21 | Graz, Austria | Otto Wanz |
| KOKO B. WARE | 5-6 | 220 | 31 | 14 | Union City, CA | James Ware |
| THE WARLORD | 6-5 | 335 | 27 | 4 | Minneapolis, MN | Terry Szopinski |
| JEFF WARNER | 6-3½ | 255 | 25 | 1 | Minneapolis, MN | Jeff Warner |
| ULTIMATE WARRIOR | 6-2 | 275 | 31 | 4 | Atlanta, GA | James Hellwig |
| KEN WAYNE | 5-6 | 195 | | 12 | Nashville, TN | Kenneth Whitlock |
| BIFF WELLINGTON | 5-11 | 220 | 25 | 3 | Lethbridge, ALTA | Shane Bower |
| PEZ WHATLEY | 5-9 | 245 | 38 | 16 | Chattanooga, TN | Pez Whatley |
| WIDOW MAKER | 6-5½ | 290 | 29 | 10 | Tampa, FL | Barry Windham |
| LUKE WILLIAMS | 5-10 | 233 | 42 | 17 | Australia | Brian Wicker |
| KENDALL WINDHAM | 6-5 | 215 | 23 | 4 | Tampa, FL | Kendall Windham |
| MR. WRESTLING II | 5-9½ | 215 | 57 | 37 | Atlanta, GA | Johnny Walker |
| STEVE WRIGHT | 5-11 | 195 | 42 | 21 | England | Stephen Wright |
| -Y- | | | | | | |
| KAZUO YAMAZAKI | 5-10 | 218 | 27 | 8 | Tokyo, JAP | Kazuo Yamazaki |
| YOSHIAKI YATSU | 6-0 | 260 | 33 | 9 | Gunma, JAP | Yoshiaki Yatsu |
| GARY YOUNG | 6-0 | 238 | 38 | 12 | Little Rock, AR | Gary Young |
| CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD | 6-0 | 220 | 22 | 4 | Amarillo, TX | Chris Romero |
| MARK YOUNGBLOOD | 6-0 | 238 | 26 | 9 | Amarillo, TX | Mark Romero |
| -Z- | | | | | | |
| VICTOR ZANGIEV | 5-11 | 228 | 31 | 1 | Kiev, USSR | Victor Zangiev |
| CHIMUR ZARASOV | 6-1 | 219 | 28 | 1 | USSR | Chimur Zarasov |
| LARRY ZBYSZKO | 5-9 | 230 | 36 | 17 | Pittsburgh, PA | Larry Whistler |
| TOM ZENK | 6-1 | 235 | 31 | 6 | Minneapolis, MN | Tom Zenk |
| BORIS ZHUKOV | 6-2 | 310 | 33 | 10 | Roanoke, VA | James Darrell |
| ***** | ***** | ***** | ***** | ***** | ***** | ***** |
| MANAGERS, VALETS AND WOMEN WRESTLERS | | | | | | |
| SCANDOR AKBAR | 5-8 | 248 | 53 | 33 | Vernon, TX | Jim Wehba |
| DOWNTOWN BRUNO | 5-7 | 130 | 26 | 5 | Pittsburgh, PA | Bruno Lauer |
| DEBBIE COMBS | 5-7 | 140 | 31 | 11 | Nashville, TN | Debbie Szoteki |
| JIM CORNETTE | 6-0 | 225 | 28 | 7 | Louisville, KY | James Cornette |
| PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY | 5-10 | 185 | 24 | 3 | Scarsdale, NY | Paul Heyman |
| CANDI DIVINE | 5-7 | 135 | 29 | 9 | Nashville, TN | |
| ELIZABETH | 5-4 | 100 | 29 | 5 | Lexington, KY | Liz Poffo |
| PAUL ELLERING | 5-9 | 205 | 37 | 12 | Mellrose, MN | Paul Ellering |
| MR. FUJI | 5-11 | 280 | 53 | 30 | Honolulu, HI | Harry Fujiwara |
| GINGER | 5-7 | 135 | | 1 | Portland, OR | |
| LOLA GONZALES | 5-7 | 140 | 29 | 12 | Mexico City | Lola Gonzales |
| RONALD P. GOSSETT | 5-8 | 320 | 46 | 1 | Nashville, TN | Ron Gossett |
| GARY HART | 6-0 | 250 | 51 | 31 | Dallas, TX | Gary Williams |
| JIMMY HART | 6-0 | 160 | 46 | 11 | Memphis, TN | Jimmy Hart |
| BOBBY HEENAN | 6-0 | 245 | 46 | 23 | Tampa, FL | Raymond Heenan |
| YUMIKO HOTTA | 5-5 | 140 | 22 | 5 | | Yumiko Hotta |
| MISSY HYATT | 5-8 | 120 | 26 | 5 | Tallahassee, FL | Melissa Gilbert |
| KUMIKO IWAMOTO | 5-5 | 133 | 21 | 5 | | Kumiko Iwamoto |
| THE BIG KAHUNA | 5-10 | 275 | 39 | 16 | Montreal, QUE | John Sutton |
| LEILANI KAI | 5-7 | 155 | | | | Patty Karisma |
| SHEIK KAISSEY | 5-10 | 245 | 57 | 30 | Turkey | Adnon Kaisy |
| SHINOBU KANDORI | 5-7 | 138 | 25 | 4 | | Shinobu Kandori |
| VERONICA LANE | 5-7½ | 122 | | 1 | Chicago, IL | |
| LORD LITTEBROOK | 4-2 | 110 | 58 | 37 | St. Joseph, MO | Roger Brooks |
| MADUSA MACELI | 5-7 | 138 | 26 | 4 | Minneapolis, MN | Debbie Maceli |
| JUDY MARTIN | 5-7 | 165 | | | | Judy Martin |
| DEVIL MASAMI | 5-6 | 165 | 28 | 12 | | Tenjin Masami |
| SHIZUKA MINAMI | 5-7 | 125 | 20 | 6 | | Mika Suzuki |
| BULL NAKANO | 5-7 | 160 | 21 | 7 | | |
| MITSUKO NISHIWAKI | 5-5 | 125 | 21 | 5 | | Mitsuko Nishiwaki |
| NITRON | 6-10½ | 350 | | 2 | | Darryl Karolet |
| YUMI OGURA | 5-2 | 120 | 22 | 7 | | Yumi Ogura |
| PERCY PRINGLE | 5-10 | 245 | 35 | 14 | Mobile, AL | William Moody |
| WENDI RICHTER | 5-7 | 135 | 29 | 12 | Dallas, TX | Wendi Richter |
| ROCKIN ROBIN | 5-7 | 120 | 24 | 2 | Denton, TX | Robin Smith |
| SAPPHIRE | 5-3 | 155 | 51 | 1 | St. Louis, MO | Juanita Wright |
| SENSATIONAL SHERRI | 5-7 | 140 | 31 | 7 | New Orleans, LA | Sherri Martel |
| SLICK | 6-4 | 170 | | 4 | Dallas, TX | Ken Johnson |
| NORIYO TATENO | 5-3 | 130 | 24 | 9 | | Noriyo Tateno |
| MINAMI TOYOTA | 5-4 | 115 | 20 | 4 | | Minami Toyota |
| JOHNNY VALIANT | 6-0 | 245 | 42 | 24 | Pittsburgh, PA | Thomas Sullivan |
| TOSHIYO YAMADA | 5-4½ | 118 | 19 | 4 | | Toshinori Yamada |
| TOJO YAMAMOTO | 5-3 | 185 | 62 | 37 | Nashville, TN | Harold Wantanabe |
| DIRTY WHITE GIRL | 5-3 | 105 | 21 | 3 | | Kim Wolser |
| WOMAN | 5-4 | 125 | | 4 | Daytona Beach, FL | Nancy Daus |
| ABDUL WIZAL | 5-1 | 125 | | 2 | Calgary, ALTA | Mohad Zein |

AUTOGRAPHS

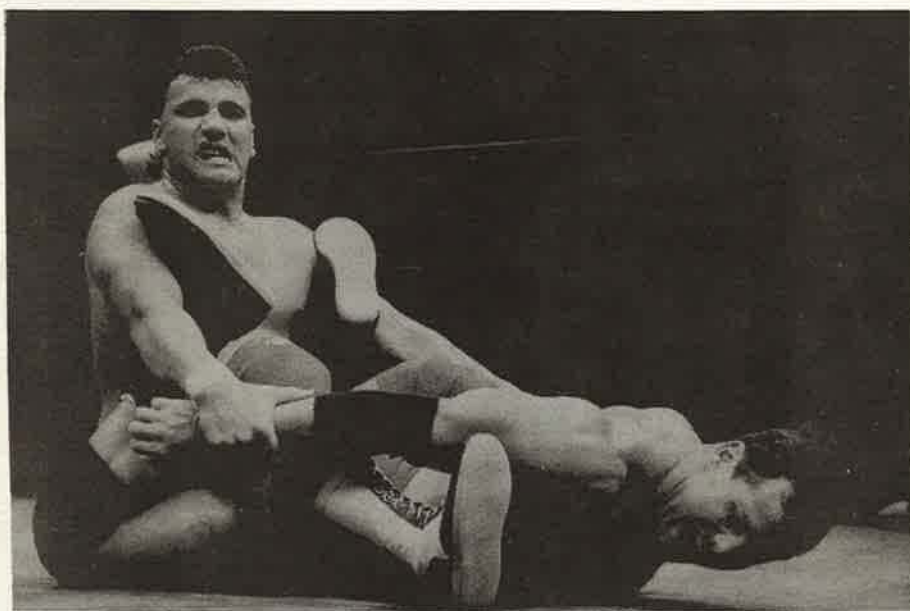




Steve Williams
Strongest Wrestler



Jushin Riger
Best Flying Wrestler
Best Technical Wrestler
Best Gimmick



Dan Kroffat
Most Underrated Wrestler



Jim Ross
Best T.V. Announcer



Jim Cornette
Best Manager



Lex Luger
Most Improved Wrestler